

# LOSER LEAVES TOWN

## Wrestlemania 23 Delivers

The expectations were incredibly high, and they were exceeded. The biggest show in the history of professional wrestling is behind us. Over \$6 Million in ticket sales alone, with 80,103 people in attendance. The attendance figure, which was announced live and is apparently legitimate, would be the biggest in company history and the biggest in wrestling history not to involve a dictatorship forcing people to go to the show. Since the wrestling business is a strange, strange world unto itself, the show will “officially” be billed as having the 3rd biggest attendance in company history.

Wrestlemania III was 20 years and 3 days earlier. Subtitled “Bigger, Badder, Better,” it drew approximately 78,300 fans (2,600 of which were comped) paying a total of \$1,599,000 to the Silverdome in Pontiac, Michigan (a suburb of Detroit). The attendance was announced as 93,173, a number that was decided on to beat Pope John Paul’s number of 88,000 in the same building. The real number was a secret for years, until Zane Bresloff, the promoter of the event, revealed it to Dave Meltzer, who later confirmed it independently via WWE’s internal records. The Silverdome eventually changed the official attendance for the Pope’s mass to 93,500 to beat Wrestlemania, since it was the building’s actual record. It’s been the subject of much internet debate over the last several years, but we can all agree that there sure were a lot of people there.

Headlined by Hulk Hogan defending the WWF Title against the newly evil Andre The Giant, the show surely could’ve drawn more people if the seats were available. Since the company was ignoring history to an absurd degree at that point, it was billed as their first meeting (it wasn’t), with the question of whether or not Hogan could bodyslam the previously un-lifted (not really) Andre, and whether or not Andre’s undefeated streak (well, it was more true than the other two) would be ended by Hogan. They wrestled and Hogan slammed him and beat him and the people were happy.

The show-stealer was Ricky Steamboat defeating Randy Savage to win the Intercontinental title in a match that went down as the cornerstone of many a childhood. Fast-paced and full of near-falls, it blew away what people were accustomed to in ‘80s boom era WWF wrestling. While it’s still an awesome match, in hindsight, the lack of hatred and violence sticks out as a little odd, as it was the blowoff for Savage crushing Steamboat’s larynx (pronounced lairniks if you’re Jesse Ventura) with the guardrail and bell several months earlier. Still, as I said, it was an incredible match, to the point that during the show, Ventura was constantly raving about it being the best match he’d ever seen.

The rest of the show was solid, if unspectacular in parts, with the highlight being Roddy Piper winning Adrian Adonis’s hair in Piper’s “retirement” match, spawning Brutus Beefcake’s barber gimmick when he assisted with the haircut after turning babyface due to being abandoned by his allies and a previous dispute with Adonis. Recently, the Iron Sheik/Nikolai Volkoff vs. Killer Bees match has gained a peculiar bit of internet infamy. During a shoot interview almost two years ago, Sheiky ranted about his hatred for Brian Blair, to the point that he said that he should’ve broken Blair’s back with the camel clutch and sodomized him, but Blair was lucky that Jim Duggan was set to run in and break the hold. It was actually Jim Brunzell in the clutch, but Sheik is an unstable drug-addled senior citizen who lost it more when his daughter was brutally murdered, so his mistake is less funny and more indicative of his sad situation.

Before this past Sunday, the actual biggest attendance in company history was for Summerslam ‘92 at Wembley Stadium in London, England. The show drew 78,927 people (announced as 80,355) paying a total of \$2,200,000. While domestic business was on a downswing, Europe was still hot, with tours being infrequent and the first live WWF shows having come just three years earlier. Local boy Davey Boy Smith main eventing the show against his brother in-law, Bret Hart. Smith won the Intercontinental title in a

tremendous match with an incredible pop for the finish. Hart claims that Smith was blown up immediately and had to be physically carried for most of the 25 minute match, which if true, means that Hart put in one of the all-time great individual performances that night. The other main event was another face vs. face contest, with WWF champion Randy Savage going to a double count-out with the Ultimate Warrior in another great match. The match was built around Ric Flair & Mr. Perfect playing mind games with both, hinting to each wrestling that they would be in the corner of the other. It turned out that they were being played, and the faces went on to form the Ultimate Maniacs tag team for a brief period before Warrior was fired (again) for using human growth hormone to try to beat the company's steroid tests. The rest of the show was largely uneventful, save for a fun heel vs. heel encounter between Shawn Michaels and Rick Martel where both pledged to Sensational Sherri (Michaels' valet at the time, who had a crush on Martel) that their match would contain no punches to the face.

On April 28th & 29th, 1995, New Japan ran two shows as part of the Pyongyang Sports Festival at Mayday Stadium in cooperation with the North Korean government. With pressure from the dictatorship, the shows drew 150,000 (\$7,500,000) and 170,000 (\$8,500,000) respectively, with main events of IWGP champion Shinya Hashimoto going to a twenty minute draw with Scott Norton and Antonio Inoki pinning Ric Flair as part of Inoki's retirement countdown tour. The shows were edited down and aired on American PPV on August 5th by WCW as Kollision In Korea. In addition to the audience, the wrestlers felt a lot of pressure, as well. Scott Norton's phone call to his wife Tammy was mysteriously cut off after he mentioned that he wasn't enjoying his stay. Norton and Chris Benoit were followed by stealthyish armed guards when they went for a run. Ric Flair was reported as praising the government in comments he never actually made. Technically, it could be considered the biggest show ever, but given the extenuating circumstances, it's not really fair to consider it as such.

So finally, a page and a half later, we get to Wrestlemania 23. The show opened with a clip of the aerial shot from Wrestlemania III as the audio of Vince McMahon's introduction from that show was played, complete with introducing Aretha Franklin's performance of America The Beautiful, leading to the 2007 version of Aretha performing it live. Good GOD, what the

hell happened to her? At this point, I expect her to be gaining weight all the time, so that didn't really bother me. The problem was that she had a ridiculous blonde wig and appears to be bleaching her skin, looking like a sexagenarian Lil' Kim. She's still an excellent singer, but what the hell? Then came the intro video, featuring blurbs from pretty much everyone in the top four matches. Excellent opening, but the WWE griot was not nearly as awesome as Alec Baldwin was a few years ago. Then there was lots of pyro and a shot of the gigantamous stage before we were introduced to the three announcing teams. Hugo Savinovich & Carlos Cabrera were conspicuously absent.

1. **Money in the Bank Ladder Match:** Jeff Hardy vs. King Booker vs. Finlay vs. CM Punk vs. Mr. Kennedy vs. Matt Hardy vs. Randy Orton vs. Edge: Insanity. Finlay, 48 years old with one leg, hit a top rope plancha onto a pile of everyone else. Booker went to grab a ladder from under the ring and came up surprised with Hornswaggle's stepladder. The stepladder was thrown at Punk's skull by Edge, and thus we got the night's first hardway cut. Edge speared everyone in the ring, except for Punk who leapfrogged it so Edge hit the post. Punk did the Terry Funk ladder helicopter spot and took out a few guys, but then Edge hit the jackpot with the spear, and the ladder took out Finlay & Orton as they got up behind Punk. The Hardys set up Edge on a ladder bridged on the apron & railing. Jeff climbed the giant-size ladder in the ring until he was a couple rungs from the top, and hit a butt splash on Edge, breaking the ladder in half. Oh my fuck. They were both stretched out and didn't return. Punk took an RKO off the ladder, and then Orton took a Bookend from the same height. Booker almost got the briefcase, but Matt stopped him by threatening Sharmell. Finlay (who cut the top of his head at some point) hit Hardy with the Celtic Cross on a ladder. Hornswaggle then emerged from under the ring and offered to climb for Finlay. Kennedy cut him off and ate a few stiff midget punches before getting tired of them and hitting the Little Bastard with a Finlay roll off the ladder. It's a good thing that they had a little person to use, if an average-sized person took that, they would've both died. Finlay laid Kennedy out and tried to climb but Punk stopped him by dropkicking the ladder. Punk climbed and Kennedy followed, but he got nailed with a great looking kick and fell off. Punk almost had it, but Kennedy rammed him with the ladder and climbed up for the win in 19:10. An incredible spectacle with everyone earning their paydays..

2. The Great Khali vs. Kane: This was what it was. Kane tried hard, but this wasn't as good as Khali's matches with Chris Candido, Giant Silva, or The Undertaker. Kane hit a bodyslam in a Hogan-Andre tribute, but it was for naught as Khali kicked out and hit his tree slam for the win in 5:29.

\* Backstage, Eugene was pouting as Cryme Tyme tried to cheer him up. Their solution? A dance party. First, Extreme Expose danced. Then Mae Young & the Fabulous Moolah joined in wearing similar outfits (complete with the backs of their tops being ripped to show us some loose old lady skin). Then came the highlight, as they were joined by SLICK, randomly returning after years and years. Then came Jimmy Hart, IRS, Dusty Rhodes, Gerald Brisco, and Ricky Steamboat in his ninja gear. Then Ron Simmons appeared and blah blah blah "DAMN!"

3. **United States Title:** Chris Benoit © vs. Montel Vontavious Porter: MVP may have had the best entrance of the night, complete with a cheerleading squad, plus some great camera angles, pyro, & screen projections. The basic story of the match was that MVP was able to hang with Benoit on the mat and tried to tear apart his arm. Crowd loved the Ballin' Elbow. A bit shorter than expected given that they went almost thirty minutes at a house show, but still very good. Benoit fought back and hit the rolling German suplexes into the diving headbutt for the win in 9:16.

\* In his dressing room, Trump (flanked by the Tara Conner, the Miss USA who went to rehab) complained on the phone about how much the amenities sucked. The lights turned red, and yup, the Boogeyman was behind the couch. Miss USA emeritus ran away screaming, while Trump no-sold it and asked for a sandwich. Eighty-six star segment.

\* Next was the Hall of Fame recap and annual waving to the crowd.

4. **World Heavyweight Title:** Batista © vs. The Undertaker: Yes, this went on less than 90 minutes in. They were pissed off about being placed so low and Batista commented in interviews that he was going to steal the show like Savage-Steamboat twenty years ago. I wouldn't go that far, but they did have an excellent match that a lot of people considered the best on the show. Undertaker's entrance saw the return of the torch-bearing druids,

and (un?)fortunately, none of them caught fire this year like Arch Kincaid did a few years ago. Great stuff with lots of smoke machines and some well-done screen projections. The crowd heavily favored Undertaker. Batista hit a tackle at the bell to start the match, and they kept a fast pace throughout. Big Dave was clearly trying much harder than usual and even hit a top rope shoulderblock. Undertaker pulled out all of his big moves, including his over the top rope tope suicida and the apron legdrop, both of which got incredible height. The big table spot was Batista hitting a running powerslam off one announcer's desk through the ECW desk. Back in the ring, they kicked out of each other's powerbombs before Taker hit the tombstone for the win in 15:46 after dodging a charge. Possibly Undertaker's best performance ever, and an excellent WWE style title match.

\* Backstage, Stephanie brought an (unseen) Aurora Rose Levesque in a stroller to see grandpa Vince. Vince proceeded to cut a bizarre half-baby talk promo while talking to his granddaughter, who had a mysterious POV camera in her stroller recording all of this. Thankfully, Vince was so great that he negated the awfulness of that camera angle. Vince baby talking about giving Trump a fractured skull may have been worth the \$49.95 on its own. Eight hundred and eighty-six star segment.

5. Elijah Burke, Matt Striker, Kevin Thorn, & Marcus Cor Von (New Breed) vs. The Sandman, Sabu, Rob Van Dam, & Tommy Dreamer (ECW Originals): This was fine. Fast-paced but nothing special. Striker took an Eddy Guerrero-level bump on a monkey flip from Van Dam. RVD won for his team with the frog splash on Striker in 6:25, and then Tommy Dreamer almost cried.

6. **Battle of the Billionaires, Hair vs. Hair:** Umaga (Intercontinental champion, w/Armando Alejandro Estrada, representing Vince McMahon) vs. Bobby Lashley (ECW champion, representing Donald Trump), with Steve Austin as guest referee: The barber's chair & haircutting supplies got their own entrance, being pulled down the ramp as ragtime music played. Brilliant. Trump was accompanied by Conner, who disappeared early on. Estrada was killed by Lashley right away. Both guys took some pretty nasty bumps, with Umaga attempting to dive at Lashley and basically tope con giroing the floor, and then Umaga evading a spear, causing Lashley to fly through the ropes and land hard on the floor. Shane appeared at some point and came in after Umaga

got fed up with Austin's aggressive officiating and spiked him. Shane hit his trashcan-assisted coast to coast dropkick and then (slowly) disrobed to reveal a referee's shirt. Umaga hit the Flying Sausage, but got a two count when Austin pulled Shane out of the ring, only to get spiked again. At this point, Trump had enough with the falderal, and nailed Vince with a clothesline and put on a clinic of ground and pound technique that he surely learned from Team Quest. Umaga tried a third spike on Austin, but it's ducked, and of course that means we get our first stunner. Spear, pin, and Vince has to get his head shaved after 13:05 of action. Shane ran back in and ate a stunner. He tried to take a backflip bump over the top rope, but failed. Poor Shane. First, his baby sister vetoes his idea to channel his dad and introduce the show, then his big bump doesn't go off at planned. He needs a hug. It's a good thing that his wife is so pretty. Vince tried to hide and run away, but Lashley carried him back to the ring, where he backed into Austin (whose head he rubbed during the gulp of fear to make sure he bumped into the wrong man), and ate our third stunner. He was strapped into the chair and gave us the greatest, Vince-est (on-camera) freakout of all-time, crying and screaming "DON'T HUMILIATE ME!" over and over. Vince tipped the chair over in horror when he saw his hairless visage in the mirror. He was very sad as he wandered to the back. Austin toasted Trump and Lashley with beer as the set-up to Austin stunning Trump. This went off slightly better than the stunner on Linda McMahon. Lashley didn't seem terribly concerned, but he did check on Trump a little bit.

\* Well, someone got their wish, sort of, because next up, there were clips of the dark match, Ric Flair & Carlito vs. Chavo Guerrero & Gregory Helms in a lumberjack match to get everyone a payday. Good guys won.

7. **Women's title, lumberjill match:** Melina © vs. Ashley: All of the women on the roster were at ringside. Melina's furry hat was the highlight of the match. Not good, but with Ashley, it could've been really bad, so they did well. Melina won in about three minutes after reversing an O'Connor Roll. Ashley attacked Melina after the match for no apparent reason, causing the other WWE Divas™ to hit the ring and randomly start brawling with each other for no apparent reason. Then it ended and everyone who remembered that they were heels ran off with Melina.

8. **WWE title:** John Cena © vs. Shawn Michaels: The pre-match video was strangely emo, but it did have some cool filmed clips I don't recall seeing used before. Cena's big entrance this year was showing pre-taped footage of a stunt driver speeding a product-placed Ford Mustang through the streets of the Detroit and into the arena, before actually appearing live and crashing through a glass Wrestlemania sign. After switching places, Cena came out the driver's side and walked to the ring. Cool idea, but not nearly as awesome as last year's ridiculous entrances. Shawn was slightly less orange than he was six days earlier on Raw, but he still looked odd enough to be terrifying. Slugfest early, which went to the floor, where Michaels propped Cena against one of the desks so he could hit him with an Asai moonsault. Michaels' knees banged the table *really* hard. I guess that if the surgery's inevitable, doing extra damage to them is fun. Or something. Michaels blocked a kick, nailed Cena's knee, and now, we go to school. He beat the hell out of the knee, even banging the outside of it on the post, which looked much nastier than how it's usually done. Another slugfest led to the "BOO!" and "YAY!" chants, with Michaels favored. Michaels got the inevitable color when he missed a charge and hit his head on the post. They were scrambling to find a good camera angle for the replay because he came close to missing it. Ref was bumped when Cena ducked a superkick. Michaels hit a piledriver on the steps, busting the top of Cena's head open for the third hardway juice of the night. Another ref comes in and counts a nearfall. I kind of loved that the ref bump didn't lead to a visual fall or the finish. Nice change to the formula. Lots of finisher teases leads to a nearfall for Shawn off the superkick. At this point, they sold exhaustion and supported each other to their feet. For Michaels, this involved cupping Cena's crotch for an uncomfortably long period of time as they got up. More reversals, STFU, and Michaels taps in 28:21. Incredible main event. Both guys were on top of their games, with Michaels giving his best outing in a long time and Cena quite possibly giving his best performance ever. Michaels eliminated most of his faults by working subtle heel, and his strikes looked the best they have in a really long time.

All in all, a fantastic show with a nice formula of great match to heat killer to great match. I was pretty surprised to see all of the negative reviews for the main event and the show in general. What do you expect from WWE style wrestling (as opposed to another style that

brings with it a different set of expectations) if you didn't like this show?

### Hogan vs. Lawler Official For Mid-South Coliseum Farewell

On April 27th, Hulk Hogan will wrestle his first independent match in more than five years, as he will headline and promote the last wrestling show at the Mid-South Coliseum. With the coliseum due to close, there had been strong hints for a few months on Memphis TV that the last show would be headlined by Hogan against Jerry Lawler. For awhile, it seemed like a pipe dream, even with Lawler signing a contract on the March 10th TV show. Then Hogan had his zillionth falling out with Vince McMahon and became determined to show that he could draw without the WWE machine behind him.

Unlike the proposed Hogan vs. Jeff Jarrett match in TNA, it actually looks like this match will happen. Hogan is promoting the show instead of Cory Maclin of Memphis Wrestling. Unlike with the proposed TNA show, they're actually in the position to draw a big live crowd paying actual money. There's also the historical significance. It's the last show at one of the most famous wrestling arenas in the world. Hogan and Lawler have not wrestled each other since 1981, where they had some one-off matches in Memphis & Florida. Hogan lost the Memphis match by disqualification, and held a grudge against Lawler for years over the editing of the match in music videos, where Lawler would be shown with the upper hand and then get his hand raised. This is Hogan's chance to get his win back. As a related aside, in pushing the importance of Lawler vs. Kerry Von Erich match at AWA Superclash III, Lee Marshall (who's the current voice of Tony The Tiger) yelled that both men had beaten the other big stars in wrestling (naming various wrestlers including Hogan, who Von Erich had never wrestled), and that the final step was beating his opponent that night.

This is Hogan's third try in a five and a half year span at getting his Uncle Vince to love him again. The first was doing an shot at the November 14, 2001 pilot TV tapings for the XWF, the attempted "major league" start-up funded by infomercial impresario Kevin Harrington. With Lawler (having recently quit the WWF) and Tony Schiavone on commentary, Hogan pinned Curt Hennig, and was interviewed by Gene Okerlund after the match. Three months later, he returned to the WWF in time to shoot the angle for his match with The Rock at Wrestlemania X-8. Meanwhile, Hennig had jumped a month before Hogan.

Shockingly, Hogan and McMahon had a falling out. The next cry for attention was Hogan working a "dream match" against Masahiro Chono at New Japan Pro Wrestling's October 13, 2003 Tokyo Dome show against Masahiro Chono. Hogan won, and at the post-show press conference got kabonged by Jeff Jarrett. Everyone in TNA was thrilled, and they set the date for their first Sunday night three hour PPV event. Then Hogan announced he needed knee surgery, so the show had to be re-scheduled. Hogan kept delaying, TNA kept rescheduling, and it never happened. Hogan was back with WWE to be inducted at the 2005 Hall Of Fame ceremony during Wrestlemania 21 weekend. That run ended a few months ago when Hogan, who hadn't been getting along too well with Vince anyway, drunkenly called the Bubba The Love Sponge show while conferencing in John Laurinaitis's assistant without her knowledge) as she went over the list of potential HOF inductees with him. Vince was angry and Hogan was gone again.

*Stay tuned for a look at the history of wrestling at the Mid-South Coliseum at the end of the month. .*

### Speaking of the WWE Hall of Fame...

....the induction ceremony was Saturday night at the Fox Theatre in Detroit. WWE.com streamed the first part of the festivities live, and amazingly enough, the stream working perfectly throughout, as opposed to last year, where it was either barely chugging along or not working at all.

1. Nick Bockwinkel (inducted by Bobby Heenan): Heenan started in fine form, stealing the plaque and saying goodnight to the crowd. His speech was good, but not quite at the level of his previous efforts. He basically admitted as much, joking that Bockwinkel was never arrested or anything interesting like that. He told a few stories about Nick's aloof nature, and then presented the plaque. Dear Lord, Nick Bockwinkel will outlive us all. He's six months older than Fuji and could pass for 15 years younger. He gave a short speech, ending with a happy statement of "I'm going to sit next to Bobby Heenan now."

2. The Wild Samoans (Afa & Sika, inducted by Samu & Rosey): Exactly what you'd expect. Samoan family legacy, speaking in the Samoan tongue, etc.

3. The Sheik (inducted by Rob Van Dam & Sabu, accepted by Joyce Farhat): RVD gave 99.9% of the speech, talking about training with the Sheik and commenting that he probably couldn't share the stories that he was told by him. Then Sabu introduced his aunt, The Sheik's widow, Joyce Farhat. She gave a very nice speech, possibly the best overall posthumous acceptance speech at any of these ceremonies. This can probably be traced to her being a wrestling person from working in the office with her husband.

4. Mr. Fuji (inducted by Don Muraco): They mostly talked about Fuji's legendary ribs. Whenever a rib was discovered, Mr. Fuji will investigate, "it was announced. Fuji's knees are in bad shape and he needed a walker, but he was very happy and seemed overwhelmed by the honor.

The webcast stopped here, and the rest of the show was aired in edited form on the USA Network at midnight.

5. Jim Ross (inducted by Steve Austin): Austin's speech was heavily edited for time. He mentioned telling Ross that he loved him before the latter's colon surgery in case anything went wrong. Ross went on to put over his wife and being a non-wrestler who grew up a fan that made it into the Hall of Fame.

6. Jerry Lawler (inducted by William Shatner): Shatner was blatantly reading off cards and got a lot of boos for it. Lawler's speech started with him putting over Lance Russell, and that part was edited from TV. Shocking, I know. Well, at least we have the DVD to see it in full. He also made a lot of Viagra jokes that got cut.

7. Curt Hennig (inducted by Wade Boggs, accepted by Hennig's entire immediate family): Boggs did a much, much better job than Shatner, as it showed that he was actually closed friends with Hennig. There was even a story (cut from the broadcast) where Boggs talked about Hennig saving his life during a hunting trip. Hennig's son was wearing his dad's Mr. Perfect suit jacket from his managerial run. Leonice Hennig, Curt's widow, gave a nice speech about how he was a great family man and loved to entertain the fans.

8. Dusty Rhodes (inducted by Dustin Runnels & Cody Rhodes; well,

that's how they were introduced): Cody looks exactly like a taller Matt Sydal. Same face and haircut. It was eerie. He's a much better talker than Matt Sydal, though, and put over his dad as the best talker in the history of the business, and it's pretty easy to agree with that. Dusty danced with Krystal, and then gave a speech (heavily edited for USA again) that made Ric Flair cry. Really. Any compliment and the tears flow. Dusty gave a great speech as expected, though it surely lost something with the edits. He put over everyone and everything in his own unique fashion.

Good show from what aired, but probably much better in full.

#### Akiyama & Rikio Win GHC Tag Titles At Noah Tour Opener

A few hours before Wrestlemania, Noah held the first show of its Spring Navigation tour at a sold out Korakuen Hall (announced as "2,100 Fans Super No Vacancy") in Tokyo, Japan. Via the magic of the internet, I've already seen the show.

1. Akihiko Ito vs. Tsutomu Hirayanagi: Basic rookie opener. Unspectacular, but well-executed. Ito won with a leaping DDT in 10:36.
2. Kentaro Shiga & Kishin Kawabata vs. Mitsuo Momota & Taiji Ishimori: Basic match with some fun comedy. Momota is pretty damn good for a 58 year-old. Kawabata pinned him with a backslide in 10:13.
3. Tamon Honda & Tsuyoshi Kikuchi vs. Junji Izumida & Makoto Hashi: If you like headbutts, then you will enjoy this match, as it had a ton of them. Good back and forth match. Izumida got the win with his Mukado Domu (halfway between a TKO and Samoan Drop) in 17:22.
4. Kotaro Suzuki & Ricky Marvin vs. Yoshinobu Kanemaru & Atsushi Aoki: Suzuki & Marvin are the GHC Jr. Tag Team Champions but their titles were not on the line. Things started to pick up here. There was a brief miscommunication between Marvin & Kanemaru during an Irish Whip early on, but everything after that was executed perfectly, with Marvin showing some impressive speed. A very good Noah junior style tag match without the overkill that tends to rear its head in their title matches. The champions won when Marvin spiked Aoki with the Santa Maria (Exploder into a Michinoku Driver) in 18:01.

5. Akitoshi Saito, KENTA & Ippei Ota vs. Bryan Danielson, Joe Legend & Ted DiBiase Jr.: This was Danielson's first match back from rehabbing his shoulder. He didn't seem rusty at all and looked good stretching Ota with various submission holds. He's really distractingly pale, though. Normally I wouldn't harp on such a thing, but it struck me more than usual. I know there are wrestlers in WWE with human-looking spray-on tans, so it's not like he has to risk skin cancer in a tanning bed. DiBiase sort of resembles Randy Orton and is arguably better than Orton was at the same stage. He used his dad's Million Dollar Dream and powerslam, both of which got over well. Legend was very impressive. It's too bad that there are no more territories or anywhere that's not WWE for him to make a big name, because he could fit as a headliner if he was perceived as more important. Another very good match. Like the juniors in the previous match, KENTA wrestles better when he's in a less important match that doesn't drive him to overkill. Foreigners picked up the victory in 19:11 when Legend used the Hospital Job (elevated reverse STO) on Ota.

6. Akira Taue & Masao Inoue vs. Bison Smith & Daniel Cross: The card placement of this match seemed odd. It didn't feel like third from the top on a semi-important Noah show. Perfectly fine match, but it was generic enough that it was out of place. Cross's comedy selling was amusing and he has some potential. That's about it. Smith (who appears to have a GH gut that's approximately a .8 Brent Albright) scored the fall on Inoue in 10:46 with the Bisontennial (Styles Clash).

7. Mitsuharu Misawa, Yoshinari Ogawa & Go Shiosaki vs. Takuma Sano, Naomichi Marufuji & Takashi Sugiura: Another very good trios match. The Misawa-Sano rivalry was pushed somewhat hard. Not overly memorable, but a good semi-final match. Marufuji got the pin in 22:50 off a wrist clutch Shiranui on Shiosaki.

8. **GHC Tag Team Titles:** Takeshi Morishima & Mohammed Yone © vs. Jun Akiyama & Takeshi Rikio: Excellent main event. Better than Batista vs. Undertaker but not quite as good as Cena vs. Michaels. The usual Noah main event style, with Yone's running jumping knee in the bleachers of Korakuen as a bonus. The big memorable main event spot was Rikio, on Morishima's shoulders, countering a Double Impact with a short-arm clothesline to Yone. Rikio used the Muso to get the pin in 23:17. Mutual

respect! was displayed by all after the match.

Very good show, worth checking out the DVD.

### **Skayde Unmasks As Mistico Wins Another Lucha de Apuestas**

Without any sort of real buildup, Mistico added a new mask to his collection on Sunday, defeating Skayde on Sunday at the El Cortijo bullring in Mexico City. The match was not even hinted at until posters appeared last week advertising that the match would happen at this random spot show. There was initially speculation that the match was just being falsely advertised, but obviously unfounded. Mistico's Lucha de Apuestas record now stands at 5-0, having previously (teaming with Volador Jr.) taken the hair of Anthrax & Evola in 2004 and then the masks of Black Warrior, Hijo del Diablo, Sephulturero, & now Skayde in the span of six months.

Skayde unmasked as Jorge Rivera Serrano of Mexico City; 42 years-old with 19 years of experience. His identity was not exactly a secret, as he had wrestled with his real name in Japan in 2002. He was trained by the late Robin Hood (also known as Brazo Cibernético, brother of Super Porky et al) and made debut as Porsche at Arena Apatlaco. He went from gimmick to gimmick for several years before getting a break in AAA as a member of Los Power Raiders (a total rip-off of the Power Rangers), Power Raider Blanco, in 1995. Unlike pretty much every other Mexican gimmick that was bootlegged from popular culture, this one led to a legal threat from the owner, in this case Saban. The gimmick was dropped, and the group was repackaged as Los Cadetes del Espacio, "borrowing" the name from the famous '80s UWA trio of Super Astro, Solar I, & Ultraman (a gimmick taken from the famous Japanese TV shows). Rivera became Boomerang, staying with AAA until August of 1996, at which point he was replaced by another wrestler in the same gimmick. This would become a pattern in AAA.

After leaving AAA, he adopted the Skayde gimmick that he's used since (with some brief stints as Elektra and Destello) on the Mexican independent scene. In 2001, he was gained prominence when he was brought into Toryumon by Ultimo Dragon to train his newest classes of students. Classes five through eight of the Ultimo Dragon Gym formed Toryumon 2000 Project (T2P). They were taught Skayde's style of fluid and peculiar chain wrestling. The holds took the place of the flying moves and unorthodox throws used as highspots by the previous classes,

developing a sub-style billed as “Lucha Libre Classica” and/or “Llave.” In spite of the name, the matches only resembled Lucha Libre in what moves were used as opposed to how the matches were paced. Skyde’s influence was clear, though, as the shows were loaded with some of his trademark moves. It was in T2P that he wrestled as Jorge Rivera. After most of the students split from Ultimo Dragon to form Dragon Gate, Rivera stuck with Toryumon.

Skyde started to occasionally tour the United States, wrestling on some independent shows while holding clinics in the Lucha Libre style. He was booked by American Gigolo, a wrestler who mostly worked Mexican indies with him. Eventually, after meeting up with Mike Quackenbush of the Chikara Wrestle Factory in Pennsylvania, Rivera signed on as an occasional instructor at the school, where Quackenbush and Chris Hero are the head trainers. Gigolo was often described as being bitter that his control over Skyde’s American bookings was “stolen” by Quackenbush. Rivera gained prominence in the U.S., wrestling from time to time in Chikara and other promotions where the other trainers worked, as well as being put over constantly by Hero, who considers him to be a major influence.

With regards to the abrupt nature of the match, it’s been noted that Skyde has not wrestled frequently in the last year due to personal issues that may have facilitated his mask loss. Like most Mexican shows, it appears that the match was not videotaped, which unfortunately makes it the first stakes match involving Mistico to not be recorded.

### **End Notes**

This is the first issue of Loser Leaves Town. It’s a work in progress, so bear with me. Future issues will have more minor news/notes, but this week had a lot of big news to cover in-depth. Other things to look for include a rundown of TV highlights, WWE 24/7 roundtable observations, book reviews, history/nostalgia pieces, columns, & more; plus a slight overhaul to my Podcast now that it has a name (some Podcasts will be free, some will be part of a subscription). The first month or so will be free, with a small subscription fee thereafter (I’m still trying to figure out the specifics). This will give people time to sample everything, plus time for me to re-do the website, time for an acquaintance to do an actual layout for this thing (that should hopefully be ready next week), time to fine ways to lengthen and increase the value of this thing, etc. As I said: work in progress.

Stay tuned to the website and enjoy!

-David Bixenspan, Loser Leaves Town Head Whatever in Chief

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