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THE RAW FILES

1995



EVERY MATCH REVIEWED!

**THE
RAW
FILES
1995**

**James Dixon
Arnold Furious
Lee Maughan
Rick Ashley
Bob Dahlstrom**

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MEET THE TEAM

All of the contributors in this book have been wrestling fans for a long time, probably longer than you would care to admit. Some of our favourite memories of our early wrestling fandom involved renting video tapes and watching them repeatedly. However, there has never been one truly all encompassing guide to those tapes, and what turns up on them. Yes, there are some great sites on the internet here and there, but nothing ever published. No guide book. Here at *History of Wrestling*, we decided that we would write that book. With a century of combined viewing between us, we have lived through all of this many times over. We decided to bring that knowledge and love of wrestling, to you. While the opinions you will read are often controversial, off-the-wall or just plain moronic, they are from likeminded people who put wrestling before almost anything else. Disagree with them if you wish, but certainly the office has seen its fair share of furniture thrown and occasional bloodshed (there was a unpleasant incident with a stapler that was later resolved with a pint). After the success of our ongoing *Complete WWF Video Guide* series, and the fun we had doing it, we have decided to branch out further and cover *everything* the WWF has ever produced. It might take a while. We start with this, the first year of what is now the company's long-running flagship show, but there will be much more to come in future.

THE TEAM AT WWW.HISTORYOFWRESTLING.INFO:

ARNOLD FURIOUS

Arnold Furious likes... Mitsuharu Misawa, Jushin Liger, Eddy Guerrero, Bret Hart, Raven, Toshiaki Kawada, Vader, Samoa Joe, Bryan Danielson, Kenta Kobashi, Star Wars, Martin Scorsese, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Bill Hicks, Wall-E, Akira Kurosawa, Johnny Cash, Scott Pilgrim, Tintin, The Wire, Firefly, The Simpsons, Jackie Chan, AC/DC, Rocky, Simon Furman, Danny Wallace, Aerosmith, The British Red Cross, Garth Ennis, Batman, Kiss, Asterix, Alan Moore's Top Ten, Astro City, Christopher Walken, Juliette and the Licks, Quentin Tarantino, Goodfellas, Kurt Busiek, Watchmen (the book, not the film), White Out (the book, not the film), Super Troopers, Swingers, Death's Head, Iron Maiden, Will Ferrell, Clint Eastwood, Trish Stratus, Everton FC, Tom Hanks, The Blue Brothers, Simon Pegg, Clerks, Terry Pratchett, Richard Pryor, Viz, Mutemath, Joe Bonamassa, How to Train Your Dragon, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Dexter, Jimi Hendrix, Alien, Aliens, Predator, Frankie Boyle, Secret Wars, Woody Allen, True Romance, Lethal Weapon, Takashi Miike, Graham Linehan, Big Bang Theory, Darren Aronofsky, John Woo, Charlie Chaplin, films with ridiculous shoot-out sequences in them, Douglas Adams, Chow Yun Fat, 12 Angry Men, Wilson Pickett, Studio Ghibli, Pixar, The Avengers, Fable II, history, Bill Bailey, Skyrim, Stephen Fry, Top Gear, kung fu movies, Alan Wake, Meet the Feebles, Die Hard, Sin City (the books and the film), zombies, Red Dwarf, Peter Sellers, Peter Cook, Michael Caine, Planet of the Apes, conspiracies, steak, The Princess Bride, Grimlock, Mel Brooks, top fives, 30 Rock, Preacher, Pringles, Pirates of the Caribbean, Back to the Future, Klaus Kinski, The Sopranos, boxing, Casablanca, Stephen King, Hunter S. Thompson, Mila Leigh's Naked, Captain America, Hawkeye, Spaced, Flight of the Conchords, Monty Python, Pearl Jam, Carol Danvers, 100 Bullets, Indiana Jones, The Goon, Thorntons, Jack Nicholson, Jim Beam, real ale, cartoons, novelty underwear, the Joker, Frank Miller, Robert Brockway, The Breakfast Club, Freddy Cry 3, Freddy Krueger, Alec Baldwin's speech in Glengarry Glen Ross, John Carpenter, Bill & Ted MMA, John Wayne, Terrence Howard, The Terminator, Guy Forsyth, nudity, coffee, crazy Japanese films that make no sense, crazy Japanese wrestling that makes no sense, crazy Japanese people that

make no sense, Greg Benson, Tony Cottam, Bernard Rage, Redje Harris, Ezet Samalca...and forever Maria.

JAMES DIXON

James Dixon has been watching wrestling for over 20 years. Inspired by the likes of Davey Boy Smith, Bret Hart and The Undertaker, Dixon was drawn to the business like any other fan, for reasons that are difficult to explain. A hobby quickly became an obsession, and Dixon was determined to get involved in wrestling by utilising the one thing he could do: write about it. In previous books James wrote alongside his "writing partner" Evil Ste. The truth is, the Evil Ste character was merely an extension of Dixon's own personality, his way of sharing his Jekyll and Hyde opinions on things. The writing choice worked fairly well at first, but the team all feel it has perhaps become more gimmicky than what was hoped, so Dixon has reverted to just writing as himself. Well, we say himself. In reality James is a former British professional wrestler, but he has adopted the pseudonym to retain relative anonymity and to distance himself from his past career in the industry. However, that past experience does give him a unique and more inside perspective on things than the others, though he is still a "mark" heart. James has limited patience for anything in wrestling post-2002, and much prefers 80s and 90s grappling. Curious really, because as you will see in these pages, he spends a lot of time complaining about it. James currently lives in the North of England, where it rains the majority of the time.

LEE MAUGHAN

Lee Maughan has been a fan of the professional wrestling industry for as long as he can remember, dating back to an embryonic memory of sitting on his grandparent's living room floor, his eyes transfixed to British household names Big Daddy and Giant Haystacks belly-busting their way through ITV's *World of Sport*. Somehow this wasn't enough to deter him, and young Lee was rewarded with having the incredibly good fortune to be within the WWF's target demographic just in time for its early 90s UK boom period. He was hooked, his bedroom quickly becoming a wall-to-wall palace of video tapes, action figures, magazines, posters and any piece of tat all stamped with the WWF insignia. His thirst for the quasi-sport was ravenous but unfortunately, his family were too cheap to subscribe to Sky television, home of the WWF. His quencher? *WCW International Pro*, broadcast well past his bedtime on regional terrestrial station Tyne-Tees. Those WWF magazines soon found themselves piled up alongside copies of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* and *Superstars of Wrestling*, making Lee possibly the most clued-up eight year old wrestling superfan in the entire TS14 postcode. It's probably not probable thanks to a further 20 years of research, that Lee is still the most clued-up wrestling superfan in the entire TS14 postcode. A trader of tapes, a distributor of DVDs and a purveyor of pixels, Lee keeps up with everything from New Japan to CHIKARA whilst continuing to catch up with the classics of pro wrestling's territorial days. Away from the grapple game, Lee likes to watch sitcoms, rock out in punk bands, and play video games with a strong preference for old school platformers and kart racers. Despite this, he even found the time to graduate from the University of Teesside in 2005 with a degree in media production, and after much soul searching and stints making Christmas cards for a living and working as a producer and on-air talent for a community radio station, is now taking the tentative first steps into the world of film video editing. He also tweets with a reverently dry sense of humour [@atomicbombs](#), but reserves the right to ignore you entirely unless you want to pay him to write about wrestling, guitar bands or 80s pop culture for your book, website or magazine.

BOB DAHLSTROM

Bob Dahlstrom is many things. A son, a brother, an uncle; but also is a dude who likes to draw. An

more importantly than that, a lifelong wrestling fan. It all started back at WrestleMania III, which hooked young Bob. He would then go onto rent every wrestling tape from every video rental place around, and watch them over and over. He's never looked back. All the artwork in this book has been lovingly crafted exclusively by Bob, specially for this publication. He lives in Illinois with his girlfriend and pet guinea pig. His wrestling artwork and autobiographical webcomic *Egomaniac* can be found at www.robertpfd.com.

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THE SCORING SYSTEM

We have used the popular star system in order to rate the matches that appear in this book. For those who are unaware of it, here is the key:

*****	Perfect
****½	Very close to perfect
****	Superb
***½	Very good
***	Good
**½	Decent
**	Average
*½	Nothing to it
*	Bad
½*	Terrible
DUD	Utterly worthless
SQUASH	Not rated (too short)
N/R	Not rated (for various reasons)
Negatives	Any match that goes into negative stars is one of the worst you will ever see

Sometimes things will be so bad, that we go into negative stars. These are matches that will make you want to stop watching wrestling and find a new hobby. We also dabble frequently in quarter stars, just when we cannot quite decide which of the above criteria a match falls under, and decide that it is somewhere in between.

It is important to remember that all star ratings are entirely subjective to the person awarding them. One man's ***** bout could be another man's **. There is no set judging system for these things, that is not gymnastics or synchronised diving. That is the uniqueness of wrestling; everyone likes it for different reasons. There have been a few times in the past that the writers have reviewed the same matches and given different ratings. This is an example of how different people perceive things. So if your favourite match is not rated as highly as you might have hoped, don't worry, it shouldn't change your enjoyment of it. In fact, many a good natured argument has occurred in our offices about whether a match is "***** or ****¾", that is just the nature of the business and one of the things that makes it so unique and fun to watch.

Some may also be wondering how we reached the scores that each show receives at the end of a review. Rest assured, it is not just a figure plucked out of the sky, like in some video game or magazine. Rather, we have created a complex algorithm that takes into account various factors and data. These include: length of the show, the ratings of the matches (and segments) broken down into weighted points that are awarded to the show, the number of matches, historical relevance, and many other factors. Unfortunately this is top secret, and we cannot go into a full explanation here. However, we can guarantee that many hours have been spent on this in order to make it the fairest and most consistent overall review scoring system you will ever find. Of course, you can still get the opinion of the writers about whether it is worth seeing, regardless of the score, in the verdict section of the review.

The score it produces is not so much an overall rating for the show, but rather a “watchability” rating. Basically, how easy it is to sit through in one sitting and enjoy. Some shows have genuine, all-time classic matches, on long cards full of dull wrestling otherwise. While that match will improve the score of the show, it alone is not enough to make the whole show watchable on its own. The match is yes, the show no.

Some tapes, shows and events inevitably end up with very high scores, and can even surpass the 100 point limit that we set. Our cap is 100, so that is the highest score a card can get. Similarly, a show can drop below zero if it is so bad, but we cap the minimum at zero so it cannot. If something receives a full 100 score, it does not necessarily mean that all of the content is perfect. Rather, as a whole, it is generally so good and consistent and in places outstanding, that it is entirely watchable and the time flies by when viewing it. These scores crop up now and again, but not too frequently. The score is the overall equivalent of a 5* match. In our eyes at least, anyway.

A complete list of the shows in order of score is available at the back of the book.

We have made attempts to be a little more generous with the ratings we awarded to matches in this book, as compared to say a pay-per-view event or home video release. This is because the content offered here was available for free on TV, and thus you are not paying to watch the bout. That in itself can sometimes be enough to turn a ** match on PPV into a *** match on TV.

INTRODUCTION

As the WWF entered 1995 little had changed about the Raw program. It was initially used the same way as it had been during 1994. There was no pressure on the WWF to improve the show and they frequently got away with running sloppy cards taped four weeks in the same venue and featuring four marquee matches in total if the crowd was lucky. All this was to change in 1995 as Eric Bischoff made the bold decision to launch Monday Nitro; WCW's flagship show, screened on WCW owner Ted Turner's own network, against Monday Night Raw. The beginning of the Monday Night Wars was crucial to public perception of Raw. It went from being another jobber show with the occasional 'can't miss' big match (Ric Flair's departure, Marty Jannetty's surprise return, 1-2-3 Kid's title shot) to being the WWF's most important hour of programming. Everything of consequence would happen on Raw. It'd feature at least two big matches every week and seek to compete against Bischoff's upstart promotion.

The major issue for the WWF going into 1995 was financial. Wrestling was in a downturn and fans weren't coming out to the shows. The Raw tapings handily demonstrate this as the WWF was lucky to pull in 4,000 fans. Average attendances went down in 1995 to less than 3,000. The WWF were desperate to replace this flow of income that had dropped so startlingly since 1992. They were so focused on dreaming up ways to improve revenue they hadn't paid much attention to the in-ring. The arrival of Nitro forced their hand. During 1995 the WWF were also seeking revenue through increasing their number of PPV's. They switched in the summer from a 5-PPV per year strategy to a monthly one. The monthly PPV format began life with the In Your House series. While these were not the draw that the bigger PPV events had been they were additional revenue for a company struggling to make ends meet.

In the ring the WWF finally became aware that their product was dated. The cartoon gimmicks of 1994 were gradually phased out and the likes of Doink began to fade into the background replaced by new edgier gimmicks like Goldust and Waylon Mercy. Of course Vince still loved his 'two job' wrestlers so we also saw debuts for Henry O. Godwinn and Duke "The Dumpster" Droese. A pig farmer and a bin man respectively. But the WWF's main issues didn't stem from new talent but rather how they booked their existing top end stars. 1995 is a disastrous year for booking. Only the Kliq seemed to get any joy out of it. Shawn Michaels began his ascent up the card, Diesel spent most of the year as WWF champion and Razor Ramon was booked strong and in top card feuds all year. As we moved away from the Kliq the booking started to get a little dubious.

Take Bret Hart for example. The WWF's most consistent performer Bret had lost the title to Bob Backlund in late '95 before Diesel began his title reign. Bret had one shot at Diesel, which ended with shenanigans, before being busted back into a series of midcard feuds. The idea being that Bret could draw by just being Bret. Meanwhile Mabel and Sid got into the title picture. Bret's '95 feuds are almost embarrassing. He faced off against Hakushi (a good wrestler but not a draw), Jean Pierre Lafitte (a decent wrestler when motivated but a pirate character) and of course Jerry Lawler. The never-ending Lawler program, kick-started at King of the Ring in 1993, continued throughout 1995 with PPV matches, huge chunks of TV time and Bret eventually having a showdown with Lawler's dentist, and another 'two job' superstar Isaac Yankem. Bret did remarkably well with these feuds. His matches were still good, against all odds, and his intensity remained. It wasn't until the WWF g

their act together and gave him a title match at Survivor Series that Bret got his reward for his dreadful 1995 program; a return to the championship picture.

It wasn't just Bret who struggled throughout 1995. The Undertaker spent most of the year treading water in bad feuds that nobody cared about. Unlike Bret, the Undertaker's response was to take it easy and coast through some of the worst matches of the decade. In particular I'm thinking about the three straight PPV's he spent working against Kama. A terrible wrestler Kama subjected fans to several dreary events he clearly wasn't prepared for against a slow-motion Taker with no fire in his bell. Then there was Owen Hart; a main event star during 1994, the WWF mysteriously got cold feet with Bret's brother and jobbed him down the card. He found himself counting lights for a parade of superstars including Bart Gunn.

The WWF were always intent on trying new things and new wrestlers and had to during 1995 thanks to their financial problems. Vince McMahon did an AOL chat in August where he mentioned the need for changing wrestlers and debuting new stars. The need was definitely there as WCW was eager to poach any talent the WWF didn't tie down to long term deals. Lex Luger jumped to make a sensational debut on the first Nitro. Alundra Blayze followed suit and dumped the WWF Women's title in the trash. A move that later forced Vince McMahon to screw Bret Hart and switch the WWF title at Survivor Series '97. Thus creating the Mr McMahon character and eventually winning the Monday Night War. 1995 saw several interesting debuts; Goldust was a flamboyant change of pace with the WWF insistent at having a 'gay' character without calling him that. Hunter Hearst Helmsley made his debut in 1995. A man who would go on to great things in the WWF. Finally Ahmed Johnson debuted in 1995. A man the WWF thought would be one of their biggest stars for years to come. He had potential to be the WWF's Goldberg years before Bill took WCW by storm.

All in all 1995 can be summed up with one phrase; desperate men do desperate things.

01.02.95 by Arnold Furious

Venue: Liberty, NY
Taped: 12.12.94
TV Rating: 2.1

We're in Liberty, New York. Hosts are Gorilla Monsoon and Shawn Michaels, which is a strange combination of Old School and New Generation. We start in the back with Double J, Jeff Jarrett, who promises a sensational singing debut this evening. "Ain't he great?" adds the Roadie as the credit roll. Gorilla claims he's here because Vince McMahon is actually too sick to work. He is? I thought Vince had to be legally dead before he missed a day's work. Gorilla wishes us a Happy New Year even though this was filmed back on 12th December 1994.

Tatanka & Bam Bam Bigelow vs. Lex Luger & The British Bulldog

As mentioned in last year's edition; Shawn wasn't a good commentator and introduced weird pauses and inflections where they didn't belong. He starts that shit right in the opening match. Luger and Bulldog would go on to be a regular team as the Allied Powers, but they're not called that yet. Luger is still feuding with the Million Dollar Corporation, but has no idea how to reflect his anger at Tatanka in his style, so he works Bigelow's arm half-heartedly before running a stupid spot where he changes ropes on clotheslines so Tatanka can knee him in the back. Lame. Shawn viciously assaults Luger moveset by claiming all he does is clotheslines; he wasn't a Lex Luger fan. Next to get Shawn's ire is the slightly fatter than usual Tatanka, who's "bulked up". Tatanka laces in a few decent chops in the corner but Luger's lack of effort in this match is palpable -he can't muster enough of a shit to not give a shit- so they stand around in a bearhug for a while. Monsoon starts laying into everyone for being lazy or stupid. Hot tag to Davey and he has Tatanka pinned with the powerslam after a few seconds, so Ted DiBiase pulls his charge to the floor and everyone gets counted out. Long way to go for such a lame finish.

Final Rating: *

Duke Droese vs. Mike Bell

Droese gets one backdrop and heads to the chinlock. LAZY! Monsoon breaks up the monotony by telling us William Shatner will be on Raw next week. Droese stops mucking about and finishes with the Trash Compactor.

Final Rating: ¼*

King's Court

"1995 and we still gotta put up with this?" – Gorilla Monsoon voices his displeasure at the ongoing King's Court. I agree, sir. At least Jerry Lawler's guest is Owen Hart. Owen is on to talk about *Survivor Series*, even though that was TWO MONTHS AGO. Nice of the WWF to be topical. Owen relates all of his 1994 successes, including beating Bret at *WrestleMania* and costing him the WWF title at *Survivor Series*. Owen has brought the submission towel with him allowing Shawn to deliver the killer whispered line of "that's the towel". Perfect delivery. Owen promises to win all the WWF titles in the same order that Bret won them in, starting with the tag titles. He promises to eventually win the WWF title and retain it until he chooses to retire, which is a pointer as to where Owen's career was heading. The fact he was going to start with the tag titles showed how he was heading down the career path. 1995 was a horrible year for Owen's career after the blow-away successes of 1994.

Jeff Jarrett vs. Buck Quartermaine

Buck Quartermaine is one of the great jobber names. He looks like a bigger version of Sean Waltman. Jarrett sleepwalks through his moves while Buck gets nothing at all. Strutting occurs. Monsoon rounds on Jarrett: “just finish the match, sing your song and get out”. Ah, my thoughts exactly, Gorilla. Jarrett obliges with the first part courtesy of a figure four.

Final Rating: ½*

Post Match: All night long Jarrett has been promising his singing debut, but he isn't happy with the quality of microphone provided for him. It probably doesn't help that his guitar isn't plugged in. Between feedback and shoddy spotlight work from the lighting crew, Jarrett walks off. So no performance this evening. Gorilla blames it on Razor Ramon. I get they were trying to draw this out but nobody cared if Jeff Jarrett could sing or not. Well, the WWF bookers probably did, but none of the fans did. It's no good building up to something that nobody cares about. If they were building up to a sing-off against a babyface then maybe that'd count for something. Even better if it was settled with fisticuffs instead. Seeing as Jarrett really can't sing, this is really going nowhere. Fast.

Instances in 1995 that the WWF used technical incompetence of their own people as a plot point

One. And counting.

Backstage: Super Dave Osborne gets to plug his new show. In case you don't remember who that is, you are too young to remember, he was a comedy stunt man.

Tatanka & Bam Bam Bigelow vs. Lex Luger & The British Bulldog

As if once wasn't enough, we get the continuation of this match to close the show. “Luger has finally been exposed for his lack of talent” says Shawn as Tatanka pounds him. The earlier match was incredibly exciting compared to this one, with the heels plodding through heat on Luger while Shawn learns new names for body parts from Monsoon. Tatanka manages to duck under a double clothesline spot, which leaves him kneeling awkwardly on the mat while Luger makes the hot tag. The heels collide and Davey just pins Tatanka for the win. Jesus, that's a lame finish. DiBiase seems to blame Bigelow for the loss. It really is hard to care after a humdrum contest with not one but two poor finishes.

Final Rating: ¼*

THE RAW RECAP:

Most Entertaining: I guess Shawn Michaels. I found his sly burial of the product to be quite amusing.

Least Entertaining: I could literally pick anyone else. Jarrett ate up a load of time with no end result. Everyone in the tag match was boring, Owen Hart said next to nothing in his interview and Dudley Droese stunk up the joint with a bad squash. I'll go with Droese for putting a chinlock into a 2-minute match. Criminal.

Quote of the Night: “1995 and we still gotta put up with this?” – Gorilla Monsoon voices his displeasure at the ongoing King's Court.

Match of the Night: Tatanka & Bigelow vs. Luger & Bulldog. The first one. Had some semblance of

formula but was pretty awful. Everything else sucked.

Verdict: 1994 was a chore to sit through. We deliberately stepped away from doing these Raw bootcamps for a couple of months just to prepare for another year of potential horror. This opening show does not help my feelings of dread. I guess technically it was shot in 1994, but hey, it can only get better right? Oh, by the way, next week's main event is Howard Finkel vs. Harvey Wippleman...

Rating: 16

01.09.95 by Arnold Furious

Venue: Houston, TX
Taped: 01.09.95
TV Rating: 2.8

We're LIVE in Houston, Texas at the Summit for the second year anniversary of Monday Night Raw. Hosts are Vince McMahon and Shawn Michaels. They run down the card including Bill Shatner on King's Court, Owen Hart getting an IC title shot and Bret Hart in the house. William Shatner has pre-recorded comments where he basically cuts a promo on Jerry Lawler and claims he's here solely to promote *Tech War* and "not wrestle". They've set the Summit up with the entranceway at the back which makes it look a bit like MSG.

WWF Intercontinental Championship

Razor Ramon (c) vs. Owen Hart

This is part of Owen's campaign to win all the WWF titles. HBK brings the history by pointing out that Owen beat Ramon to win *King of the Ring*. Vince gets in on it by talking about *WrestleMania* and the Shawn-Razor ladder match. Razor combats Owen's speed with his usual smashmouth brawling style, but his opening shine is overly long and he spends too much time working Owen's arm although Owen does incorporate some superb counters. I like how Owen's stuff blends into Razor's stuff, like an attempt at a crossbody being a genuine Owen move and Razor countering into the fallaway slam. However, I resent that every time Razor sets for the Edge anywhere near the ropes, he telegraphs a backdrop over them. Owen adds in a tope at speed before Razor rolls through a second crossbody into a pin for 2. I like them mixing it up. Owen on offence is nowhere near as boring as the staple heel offence commonplace during the era. Just compare his stuff to say Tatanka or IRS. Owen mixed up high risk and technical offence, with just enough cheating in there to stop him wrestling clean face. Also, a chinlock. Owen's creativity won't allow him to sit in it long, but it does set up a Princess Bride sleeper moments later. Razor fights out and starts throwing those famous right hands. They slightly botch the set up for a chokeslam, with Razor having to grab it a second time. Minor issue. Owen dumps Razor groin first on the ropes to set up a missile dropkick and 'the Rocket' straps on the Sharpshooter with Vince calling for a DQ on account of the nut shot. Bret Hart promptly runs in for the DQ. Really good match, which Owen usually had with anyone who was game. Razor was, and the BS finish was needed to protect Owen to keep him strong. They basically gave up on that as the year continued.

Final Rating: ***¼

Backstage, Jerry Lawler has words for William Shatner, promising to "beam him so far up he'll never come down". I think he meant to punch him.

Hakushi vs. Matt Hardy

Hakushi is making his debut and has Shinja in his corner. Matt flubs an early trip to the ropes so Hakushi flips around to show him how it's done. Hakushi nails Matt with a diving elbow smash and finishes with a tame slingshot splash. Not what you'd call a stunning debut and certainly not the match you'd expect from the names involved.

Final Rating: ½*

The King's Court

Jerry's guest is ~~William Shatner~~, in case you missed him. ~~Shatner acts without saying anything.~~ Wonderful stuff. King shills *Tech War*, which follows Raw on USA every Monday night and was written by Shatner. Shawn makes *Star Trek* jokes while Shatner claims chewing gum is more interesting than the King's Court. Lawler gets into Shatner's personal space and a ruck is impending as Shatner claims everyone in this crowd watches *Tech War*. Um, guess again Bill. King tries to charge The Shat but gets taken over with a monkey flip. Bret Hart strolls out to "save", despite the fact that Lawler is so toothless that he was taken out by an actor. Still, the segment was a lot of fun and Shatner was game for the wrestling monkey business.

King Kong Bundy vs. Gary Sabaugh

Sabaugh is the guy who looks like Garry Shandling. Bundy corner splashes him and pins in 9 seconds. Wait, that seems very familiar. The only real highlight is Shawn calling Bundy "love chunks" post-match when the big man claims he'll win the *Royal Rumble*.

Final Rating: SQUASH

Tuxedo Match

Howard Finkel vs. Harvey Wippleman

Both guys are cornered by tag teams. Fink has the Bushwhackers while Harvey has Well Dunn. The feud has been rumbling on for a while, with Fink taking exception to the loudmouthed and irritating Wippleman. Tuxedo matches are so gay. Who on earth wants to watch two ugly men tearing each other's clothes off? Especially when Tuxedo matches traditionally involve the less manly men in wrestling. Let's face it, no one wants to see a couple of middle aged skinny guys stumbling around the ring with their trousers around their ankles. "I've seen two chicks fight better than this" – Shawn Michaels criticises women's wrestling. Howard manages to retain his cummerbund to win. On the upside, at least no one was wearing a thong. On the downside, every Tuxedo match is horrid.

Final Rating: DUD

THE RAW RECAP:

Most Entertaining: Owen Hart. Tempted to go for Shatner for that slick monkey flip, but Owen was on form.

Least Entertaining: Whoever decided to book a Tuxedo match as Raw's main event.

Quote of the Night: "I've been impressed a lot but this isn't one of the most impressive times I've had" – William Shatner is not impressed to be on Raw.

Match of the Night: Razor Ramon vs. Owen Hart. I'm glad we have a decent match after just two weeks of the new year. It bodes well.

Verdict: Tuxedo nonsense aside, the second year anniversary Raw show was ok. Good IC title match, good celebrity involvement and nothing outstayed its welcome.

Rating: 50

01.16.95 by Arnold Furious

Venue: Houston, TX
Taped: 01.09.95
TV Rating: 2.6

We're in Houston, Texas. This show was taped after the live Raw the previous week. Hosts are Vince McMahon and Shawn Michaels. The latter makes a load of Gridiron references ahead of the Super Bowl.

The Heavenly Bodies vs. 1-2-3 Kid & Bob Holly

The Bodies were sadly towards the end of their WWF run so, despite Jim Cornette still being the manager, they're on job duty here. That means there can't be many more Jimmy Del Ray showcases remaining. A pity as he's the greatest short and fat wrestler in the history of the business. Holly gets double teamed by the superb Bodies offence. If there was ever a team -other than the Brainbusters- who made their heat fun, it was the Bodies. They show that in spades in the dismantling of Holly. Oh how I wish they'd been given a proper push. Doctorbomb for Holly but he miraculously kicks out. I do not agree with that, it should have been a Kid save. Tatanka and Bigelow stroll out to watch as they're facing Kid and Holly for the straps at the Rumble. Given those two choices, how on earth were the Bodies not selected instead? I'm not being biased here; they were fantastic. Kid tags in and gets double teamed too, but Holly spears Pritchard allowing Kid to finish Del Ray with a sweet bridging fisherman suplex. Amazing high bridge on that from the Kid. It might have been a short match, under five minutes, but it was awesome stuff from bell-to-bell. I once again plead with the Time Lords to get rid of that goddamn tag division booking in late '94 and early '95 and just put the belts on the Heavenly Bodies. This match alone should have been evidence in their favour. Kid and Holly were fun tandem, but the Bodies were the finished article and could have a blast against any babyface team the WWF could dig up to face them.

Final Rating: ***½

Backstage: Vince and Shawn get an interview with Bret Hart and Bill Shatner. Vince asks Bret if he's rusty but he claims not. Shawn infers that Shatner should watch his back but The Shat is not concerned. Of course not; he's a robot from the future. He calls Roadie "Roadkill". The WWF seamlessly switches from this interview to Vince plugging the Raw debut of Mantaur. NO SHAME.

Mantaur vs. Jason Arndt

Jim Cornette somehow got saddled with Mantaur, whose entrance music is a cow mooing. A cow mooing. MOOOOO! Why is Mantaur a heel? He moos. Arndt tries hard (as you'd expect, he is the future Joey Abs while he was still being mentored by Matt Hardy). Mantaur's main source of offence is running his big fat belly into Arndt. One of those finishes when accompanied by a big fat splash. In case you missed him; Mantaur was one of the WWF's dumbest ideas but he was also terrible in the ring.

Final Rating: ¼*

Jeff Jarrett vs. Bret Hart

Jarrett is cornered by the Roadie. Bret, who's hardly been on TV since his *Survivor Series* title loss, is cornered by William Shatner. Bret gets a huge pop. He's on his way to a WWF title shot again.

Diesel at the Rumble while Jarrett has a shot at the IC strap. Jarrett brings the Memphis stalling which on an hour long show is uncalled for. When the action kicks in Jarrett is in the mood to take bumps while Bret laces in his perfect strikes. Every time Jarrett tries for a move Bret has a counter lined up. It's a wrestling masterclass from the Hitman, countering slams into armdrags or hip tosses into backslides. It's beautiful. Jarrett finally gets something with his own counter; a back suplex out of a sleeper. They go to the near fall counters, not quite at the Malenko-Guerrero level just yet but smooth. Jarrett slows things up a touch on offence but Bret is in no mood to let him, so whenever Jarrett stalls too long Bret throws in a comeback. He has enough moves to get the majority of the match and Jarrett can bump around all day. The pace is unrelenting. Jarrett goes to the eyes to prevent the Sharpshooter but he can't follow up quick enough for Bret's liking and they run a spot on the ropes afterwards where Roadie interferes to actually change the tide. Jarrett gets the figure four on, but Shatner pushes the ropes in for Bret to reach them. They rock in another near falls reversal and Bret scores the duke this time. Post match Shatner kicks the Roadie's ass. Awesome. Bret and Jarrett busted their asses in this one. It's a minor classic. I'm surprised it's not made its way onto more tap releases.

Final Rating: ****

The King's Court

Lawler has the whole Million Dollar Corporation on. Ted DiBiase calls the fans "mongoloids". Not sure that's a PC term, Ted. DiBiase promises IRS will bury the Undertaker. "The only dead thing I like is Dead Presidents". Nice. Ted promises the Million Dollar Corp will take the tag straps too. He's so enthused about it that they've already signed a title defence against the Smoking Gunns. The final ridiculous claim from Ted is that King Kong Bundy will win the *Royal Rumble*. Is he serious with this? Bundy was his title aspiration guy? What he was saying was bullshit, but the way he said it was incredible. Superb promo work from Ted DiBiase.

Mabel vs. Lee Toblin

Toblin looks like Bret from *Flight of the Conchords*. Mabel plods through his moveset. Whoomp the it is, etc. The moves are impressive from a big fat guy, but the speed he's doing them at is offensively slow. When Toblin starts whaling on him the difference in speed is really noticeable. Toblin is off decent kicks, good bumps. Mabel legdrops him for the win.

Final Rating: ½*

Post Match: the commentators pop up to ask Mabel about the Rumble match. Mabel points out he's the biggest so he'll win. King Kong Bundy strolls out to have a word about size. Mabel wants a Battle of the Fat Bastards RIGHT NOW but Bundy is too fat to get in the ring. Shawn claims he'll win the Rumble while all of this is going on and Vince throws to a Diesel promo video.

THE RAW RECAP:

Most Entertaining: Bret Hart. Absolutely phenomenal in his first TV match since November. He lit fire under Jeff Jarrett's ass and they had an early contender for Raw MOTY.

Least Entertaining: Mantaur. Moo!

Quote of the Night: "Nobody needs to watch my back, I can take care of myself" – William Shatner

Match of the Night: Bret Hart vs. Jeff Jarrett. Brilliant free TV match. PPV quality action from two technical masters.

Verdict: Sensational Raw. Two great matches, a couple of decent interviews and very little to hate on. If every Raw had wrestling action this good, I'd have virtually nothing to complain about. Sometimes the hour length can put limitations on the WWF but their product came across really well here. Shawn Michaels is stuck at the announce desk for these shows.

Rating: 78

01.23.95 by Arnold Furious

Venue: Palmetto, FL
Taped: 01.23.95
TV Rating: 2.7

We're in Palmetto, Florida at the Manatee Civic Center. Between this and Houston the WWF looks to be expanding into larger arenas for Raw and wider territories. Vince McMahon opens the show and apologise for the actions of "Scott Bam Bam Bigelow" for his scuffle with Lawrence Taylor at the *Royal Rumble*. Vince does it in his serious voice to make it sound like a real life incident, not an angle. Bigelow eats an unpaid suspension, storyline, but will end up headlining *WrestleMania*. Hosts are Vince McMahon and 1995 *Royal Rumble* winner Shawn Michaels, who gets his own entrance.

WWF Tag Team Championship

1-2-3 Kid & Bob Holly (c) vs. The Smoking Gunns

This is one day after Kid and Holly's upset title win. That was the final of a tournament after Shawn Michaels and Diesel vacated the belts back in November. Originally the Gunns were booked to win but Bart Gunn got injured, hence the re-tooling of the tournament for the underdogs victory. Because both teams are faces they start with handshakes and niceties. The Kid seems to be the most popular guy and yet Bart still gets popped for powerslamming him. The crowd are willing to back both teams. Normally the bigger team ends up slightly heel. That's evident with Billy getting a blind tag and hitting a bulldog on the unsuspecting Holly. The Gunns appear to have superior tag team skills until Holly shoves Bart into Billy up top and the champs hit a double team superplex for two. Billy starts shrugging off Kid's chops so Kid switches to more effective kicks. The crowd's responses start leaning towards the underdogs and the Gunns spots start getting popped less. The crowd's reaction is muted. Kid gets caught with a Rocker Dropper and again the crowd don't respond. Bart manages to just about get heat on his hot tag. Against the 1-2-3 Kid. The Gunns bust out the double teaming to get heat on Kid. How on earth are they still managing to work formula in a babyface tag? Shawn starts riding Billy Gunn for delaying his pins and not hooking the leg. Holly's hot tag is decidedly lukewarm as the fans can't really decide who to root for. They pop spots but not anything else. Holly misses off the top and Billy takes it with the Sidewinder. The crowd pop a title switch but do they actually like the Gunns? Based on this it's really hard to say. Match meandered a bit thanks to the Gunns moveset being so weak. Compared to the Kid/Holly match against the Heavenly Bodies last week, there's no comparison.

Final Rating: **½

Post Match, Kid says he's disappointed and Holly blames a tough match the previous night. Kid asks for a re-match next week. We head to the commentary position where Shawn Michaels announces he's looking for a bodyguard to watch his back into his *WrestleMania* title shot.

IRS vs. Buck Quartermaine

Because this match will be completely boring, Vince throws to Roddy Piper via telephone. Piper is on his shill duty and claims the 1995 *Royal Rumble* was the best ever. Shawn and Piper have a nice back-and-forth due to their ability to think on their feet. The match isn't long enough to cover the phone call. IRS finishes with the Write Off. Piper continues to ramble. He'll be providing new commentary on the Encore Plus for the Rumble re-run and promises an exclusive interview with "that jerk" Shawn Michaels.

Final Rating: ½*

The King's Court

Lawler's guest is NEW Intercontinental champion Jeff Jarrett. He offers Razor Ramon a re-match anytime. Jarrett isn't content with the IC strap though and challenges Diesel to a WWF title match. Vince calls him greedy before proclaiming the British Bulldog as the Rumble winner. Oops. Jarrett's title aspiration bombshell made this meandering promo worthwhile. Not that anyone considered Jarrett world champion material at the time.

The British Bulldog vs. The Black Phantom

The jobber is David Heath aka Gangrel, who gets in a few nice moves before Bulldog takes over. Phantom takes a few slick bumps off clotheslines and such. Davey lacks imagination though and hooks a chinlock to eat up his time in charge. Running powerslam finishes.

Final Rating: ¾*

Backstage, Bam Bam Bigelow is due to apologise for his actions at the *Royal Rumble*. However the WWF's crack technical crew can't get his earpiece to work so he can't hear his cue to start talking. I don't know why the WWF so persisted with the incompetence of their tech for plot points. It's embarrassing.

Instances in 1995 that the WWF used technical incompetence of their own people as a plot point

Two. And counting.

THE RAW RECAP:

Most Entertaining: Shawn Michaels. Shawn was on form on commentary, continuously gloating about his Rumble win and criticising everybody else for their mistakes. I'm surprised they didn't make more of his win on this show, as instead they focused on Bigelow.

Least Entertaining: IRS. But at least they knew he was going to be boring and instead got Roddy Piper to talk over his match.

Quote of the Night: "I have plans up my sleeves. And that's not easy for a guy who never wears sleeves. That's just how sneaky I am" – Shawn Michaels.

Match of the Night: The Smoking Gunns vs. 1-2-3 Kid & Bob Holly. A decent title match up. Shame they went with the Gunns, based on looks, rather than a good team to boss the tag division. This was actually the shortest of their three tag title runs, ended for Owen Hart to achieve the first of his golden goals at *WrestleMania*.

Verdict: Nothing dragged and the tag title match was decent, but it's not what you'd call a good show. At least they set up a tag title rematch for the following week, but the hour showed it had limitations here. If the big marquee match isn't a stunner then the rest of show can't make up for it. That really puts the pressure on the marquee match to deliver.

Rating: 31

01.30.95 by Arnold Furious

Venue: Palmetto, FL
Taped: 01.23.95
TV Rating: 3.0

We're in Palmetto, Florida, with this filmed after last week's live Raw. Hosts are Vince McMahon and Shawn Michaels.

Two-man Rumble

Mabel vs. King Kong Bundy

They booked this after the two big men collided during the Royal Rumble match. To win you have to throw your opponent over the top rope and both feet must hit the floor. Given that the Rumble rules are in effect, both fat bastards just hug the ropes for the whole match. This does not meet my basic standards for "wrestling". If it was called the World Fat Guys Hugging Federation then this would be a title match. But it's not. IRS and Tatanka get bored watching something so horribly tedious and just jump in there to throw Mabel out, although it takes ages. To call this a match would be an insult to actual wrestling matches.

Final Rating: -**

Backstage, Vince McMahon gets words with Bam Bam Bigelow. The Bammer calls his defeat to 1-2-3 Kid a fluke because every dog has his day. Vince asks Bigelow about Lawrence Taylor laughing at him. Bam Bam calls Taylor's laughter disrespectful. Athletes should show respect for each other. Bigelow refuses to apologise to LT and instead challenges him to a fight. Vince's reactions combined with Bigelow's aggression made this good fun.

Hakushi vs. Ricky Santana

Santana looks like a chunkier Ricky Steamboat. He's decently mobile and is able to take Hakushi's strikes, including a killer back kick to the jaw. Shawn has fun again cutting Vince down by correcting his pronunciation of "Shinja". Santana continues to keep up but Hakushi's spots are on another level, like a flying shoulderblock off the top. A cartwheel standing moonsault finishes. Hakushi's flipping always looks nice, but isn't high impact enough for my liking. He is a great wrestler, but on the soft side of the spectrum.

Final Rating: *¾

Aldo Montoya vs. David Sierra

Sierra is a bearded Latin veteran. Aldo throws some awful punches. Nobody punches a guy in the top of the head Aldo, nobody. That's the hardest part of the head. Stop aiming for it! Aldo is just abysmal here; so sloppy. The only remotely worthwhile spot is a pescado that Sierra has to move in order to catch Aldo on. The finish is a botched diving bulldog. I've only ever seen one decent Aldo Montoya match. I'd have switched him back to job duty ASAP.

Final Rating: DUD

The King's Court

Lawler's guest is Mr. Bob Backlund. Lawler runs through Backlund's interview material for him but Backlund shows disdain for Lawler. Backlund says from now on he won't let people out of the

Crossface Chickenwing unless the victim screams “I quit, Mr. Backlund”. Lawler pushes his luck by saying he could get out of it. Backlund should have put him down, Lawler should know his place: “No one is exempt from that policy”. Backlund points out the King is NOT exempt and he should shut up. Lawler still doesn’t get it so Backlund slaps him in the CFCW. “I quit Mr. Backlund”. As Backlund leaves, Lawler backs up and claims he just quit doing the interview. Backlund comes back down and Lawler takes a powder. This was awesome. It blurred the lines and tried to do away with all that Hell Club bullshit the WWF had been running forever.

WWF Tag Team Championship

The Smoking Gunns (c) vs. 1-2-3 Kid & Bob Holly

Keep in mind this was signed “last week” but it’s actually the same night, so this is the second time this crowd has seen this match. Kid and Billy work some tidy chaining before the challengers bring some double teaming, then Kid comes back in to eat the Gunns’ double teaming. Then the tide changes again and it’s like they’re taking it in turns to demonstrate double teams. Curmudgeon Bob Holly gets a little salty with Billy and fisticuffs ensue. Like last week, or earlier tonight depending on your perspective, the crowd is divided so deeply that they like both teams but can’t bring themselves to cheer for either. Kid’s kicks raise the tempo. A few of his front leg back kicks are terrific. Eric Bischoff would be having kittens. Kid misses a senton but lands on his shoulder and stops moving. The ref rings the bell and a hush comes over the crowd as they suspect a serious injury. It’s just an injury angle and a very poor way to end the match. At least they had a clean switch last time but this match was going better until the finish. Matters are made a thousand times worse by Vince “I hate making money” McMahon who announces the Kid just got up and walked to the back during an ad break. Way to go Vince. Bad finish that leads nowhere. Perfect.

Final Rating: **¼

Kama vs. Jumbo Beretta

Kama is a big dude, the former Papa Shango, making his Raw debut. Jumbo is appropriately named because he’s a blubbery lardass. “A kick to the blubber” calls Shawn after Kama boots his tubbier opponent in the abdominal area where Jumbo’s abs would be if he had any. Abdominal folds, maybe. Vince runs the last match into the ground further by pointing out that the 1-2-3 Kid is 100% fine. So he’s just a pussy then? If I was Bob Holly I would kick his ass for that. Back in the Kama match nothing much is happening. Kama has ok kicks but doesn’t know when to use them, so most of his offence is rest holds and dull stuff. He calls for a finish and hits the belly-to-belly. Nobody cares Kama, nobody cares. He finishes with an STF with a chinlock instead of a facelock. Possibly because that was the only way to get fat boy Beretta’s neck to bend right.

Final Rating: DUD

THE RAW RECAP:

Most Entertaining: Bob Backlund. His craziness exploded before an assault on Jerry Lawler. Great segment.

Least Entertaining: Kama. Boring debut from a guy with no visible personality. This would continue until he switched gimmicks to the Godfather.

Quote of the Night: “No one is exempt from the Crossface Chicken-wing, including yours truly” Bob Backlund says something crazy about submitting himself.

Match of the Night: ~~The Smoking Gunns vs. 1-2-3 Kid & Bob Holly.~~ Ok little title contest but with terrible finish, straight from the School of Lame Finishes. Vince's burial of whatever angle they had going just increasing the uselessness of it all.

Verdict: Two interviews highlight this poor wrestling show. Bigelow's verbal attack on LT and Backlund's physical attack on the King. The wrestling was worryingly subpar around those two incidents. Bundy-Mabel was beyond awful and two squash matches both featured inadequate talent. Aldo and Kama. The tag title match was fine but the finish stunk. So all in all a poor show for in-ring but a good show for talking.

Rating: 38

Venue: Palmetto, FL
Taped: 01.23.95
TV Rating: 2.8

Hosted by Vince McMahon and Shawn Michaels, who have quite obviously been superimposed over a shot of the crowd in an attempt to make the show seem live. What's worse than that, is that I can hear Oscar attempting to rap in the background. Oh hell, what a way to start.

Men on a Mission & Lex Luger vs. Tatanka, IRS & King Kong Bundy

After recovering from the seizure the flashing lights in MOM's entrance gave me, I open my eyes to the sight of THIS match. Ok, this has got to be some sick joke, because I saw Furious chuckling away at his desk while covering January, where he seemed to get decent to good matches and segments every other week. What do I get to start February? A collection of all my least favourite wrestlers in one match! Tatanka reminds me why I wanted to set him on fire in 1994, by doing the least intimidating "pissed off tough guy" stare I have ever seen. Seriously, he looks like a complete idiot. Mabel and Bundy start things out, continuing their horrible TV feud. The action is indescribable, and Mabel enzuigiri blows my mind, but not in a good way. Mo comes in and tries to slam Bundy, because he is a tool, and Michaels mocks him for it. Rightfully so! IRS comes in, and I look away, continuing my boycott from 1994 of anything involving IRS. I am tempted to add Tatanka to that list, because he makes me feel violent when I watch him. He and Mabel run a bad sequence with some incredibly blatant telegraphing of moves, and then the corporate Injun bails when Luger finally tags in. Thank god for that; I cannot tolerate seeing anymore matches between those two. Of course, the alternatives are equally awful, but at least IRS coming in gives me the chance to sip my coffee. The one positive I can say for this is that at least the resting spots one would associate with all of them, have been limited due to the sheer number of participants. Six-man tag matches are hard to make boring, and while I detest five of these guys (my favourite of the lot is Mabel!), they are tagging in and out frequently enough to keep this on the cusp of acceptable. Well, not acceptable, tolerable. Mo takes the heat because he is by far the most expendable, as things slow to a crawl with Bundy back in. There is not a huge difference in size between Bundy and Mo, though Bundy is bigger, yet the difference in the way they carry themselves and impose themselves is huge. As I said in 1994, Mo moves, sells and works like a much smaller guy. I don't mean that as a compliment as I would if I were describing Bam Bam Bigelow, but more that he manages to make himself appear smaller and thus less intimidating than he actually is. Bundy does the opposite, and while he is horrid to watch at least he works like the big fat bastard he is. You would never have seen Mo challenging Hulk Hogan for the title in the 80's that's for sure. Luger gets the hot tag as Vince lies that "this will be most interesting". Luger slams Bundy and that brings in Tatanka, as a pier sixer breaks out. Tatanka hits a DDT on Luger in the melee, which Vince seems to think is out of order, despite Mabel being in there as well, and Bundy pins him for the win. That was no-where near as bad as I feared, but some of the action was almost laughable in places.

Final Rating: ¾*

Man Mountain Rock, he of backstage documentary (that has never been made) fame, gets an MTV *Behind the Music* style promo vignette and it is actually pretty good! The character wasn't dreadful, I mean he was a rock star, but he pissed a lot of guys off with his video camera, and thus had no chance

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