

Wrestling Observer Newsletter

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WWE NO WAY OUT PPV POLL RESULTS

Thumbs up 223 (75.6%)

Thumbs down 39 (13.2%)

In the middle 33 (11.2%)

BEST MATCH POLL

Raw Elimination Chamber 236

Smackdown Elimination Chamber 21

John Cena vs. Randy Orton 8

WORST MATCH POLL

Edge vs. Rey Mysterio 67

Smackdown Elimination Chamber 55

John Cena vs. Randy Orton 52

Chavo Guerrero vs C.M. Punk 45

Ric Flair vs. Mr. Kennedy 31

ELITE XC STREET CERTIFIED POLL RESULTS

Thumbs up 70 (74.5%)

Thumbs down 11 (11.7%)_

In the middle 13 (13.8%)

BEST MATCH POLL

Yves Edwards vs. Edson Berto 61

Kimbo Slice vs. Tank Abbott 8

WORST MATCH POLL

Antonio Silva vs. Ricco Rodriguez 46

Britt Rogers vs. James Thompson 9

Kimbo Slice vs. Tank Abbott 8

Based on phone calls, e-mails and fax messages to the Observer as of Tuesday, 2/19

Floyd Mayweather Jr. was the surprise celebrity who will appear at Wrestlemania this year after shooting an angle where he appeared to break

the nose and bloody up the face of Big Show at No Way Out on 2/17 in Las Vegas.

Although Show appeared on television with his nose taped up, and a slow motion replay of the punches show Mayweather Jr. really connected with them, and an elbow cracked the nose, we're told by a company source that

the angle went exactly as rehearsed and scripted the night before and that Show didn't suffer a broken nose.

The card is shaping up as Randy Orton vs. John Cena vs. HHH for the WWE title, Edge vs. Undertaker for the world title, an eight-man Money In the

Bank ladder match (Mr. Kennedy, Shelton Benjamin and Jeff Hardy in, and likely for guys like Chris Jericho and perhaps MVP and Matt Hardy if the

latter two aren't wrestling each other), a Ric Flair match (possibly Shawn Michaels), Mayweather vs. Show, and likely something with Fit Finlay vs. JBL, perhaps a tag with Finlay & Hornswoggle vs. JBL & Vince McMahon.

WWE announced on 2/19 it would be Show vs. Mayweather in a single

match.

The plan had been for a tag match with Rey Mysterio & Mayweather vs.

Show

& Shane McMahon, however, Rey Mysterio, who is expected to be involved

in

the angle going forward, likely in Mayweather's corner, suffered a full

right biceps tear of the muscle off the bone and even though it was

talked about him staying to do the angle, he will be having surgery on

2/22. He's claiming he will be like John Cena and come back early, but

the usual recuperation time after biceps surgery is six months.

The key stuff was finalized with HHH and Undertaker winning the

respective Elimination Chamber matches. Cena beat Orton via DQ at No

Way

Out when Orton hit the referee, but a non-title rematch was held the

next

night in Anaheim with HHH as referee. HHH played fair referee, and Cena

pinned Orton with an FU. After the match, HHH laid both to waste with a

pedigree. The three way was probably the best option, because how shows

have suddenly become very profitable again, and with Cena doing a

movie,

he can't be doing house shows for the next couple of months. But Cena

is

clearly the company's big star, and obviously, HHH winning the title at

Mania has been the plan for two years, which didn't happen in 2006

because they decided to delay it since they were going to redo DX, and

it

didn't happen in 2007 because he was out of action with a torn quad.

You

can argue Jeff Hardy is hotter right now, and in the end, Mania is

doing

basically the buys based on the name and the celebrity angle. But it is

what it is, and it's not like HHH isn't a major superstar.

No Way Out was a good show, largely due to the Mayweather angle and the

Raw elimination chamber match. Nothing was really bad all things

considered. Rey Mysterio vs Edge was the weakest match, but Mysterio

had

torn his right biceps on a 2/13 house show in Santiago, Chile, and had

no

business wrestling on the show in the first place. It was more bad in

that it was a 5:00 world title match, not that there was anything wrong

with the match itself. From a wrestling standpoint, the show wasn't as

good as most TNA shows, but the Mayweather angle, big show atmosphere,

star power and feeling of importance overrode that, aside from the main

event, none of the matches were really above standard fare.

Mysterio may needed surgery or he'd have a permanent gap in his arm

where

the muscle used to be. He was not wanting surgery because after missing

Wrestlemania last year due to knee surgery, he didn't want to miss it

this year, particularly because of the high profile angle.

The show drew a sellout of 13,500 fans to the Thomas & Mack Center.

Between Cena challenging for the title and two elimination chamber

matches, the buy rate was guaranteed to be way above the 210,000

worldwide buys last year's show. It wouldn't surprise me for the show to have hit 300,000 and more than 180,000 domestic. Our numbers were up 59% from last year so it could be even bigger than that.

The company feels hot among its audience base, as exemplified by strong ticket sales at live events, going into Mania. So they are going to end up with three big PPVs to start the year instead of two. To me, you learn based on what works and what doesn't, and that means Cyber Sunday should be kaput. The buy rate has been an embarrassment most years. As much as I

like it as a concept, and like the idea of a few annual concept PPVs, when it doesn't work year-after-year, a lesson should be learned. Conversely, they should do an Elimination Chamber match annually at No Way Out for the title shot for the brand that doesn't win the Rumble.

Two was a bit much, because it divides the focus. But one with the Mania title shot at stake changes it from a "B" show people skip in between the two big ones, to one that feels like it has major impact, plus the Chamber has drawn well every time except on the ECW show. Shane McMahon began pitching Mayweather a few months back after meeting him. Shane has pitched ideas of using shooters for Mania angles in the past. It's well known Shane gets along well with Chuck Liddell, but

Dana

White, who will say nothing negative publicly about the McMahons (everyone in MMA praises Vince because at the end of the day, he is put together an organization that is what all of their dreams are), has a thing about not wanting anyone under UFC contract to participate in pro wrestling.

Shane McMahon's idea was actually for Mysterio & Oscar De La Hoya to be a tag team against Mayweather Jr. and a partner. Based on the story, this would make far more sense since Mysterio & De La Hoya have the obvious Latin hero connection, while Mayweather was the heel to the public in both the De La Hoya match and the Ricky Hatton match last year. He's miscast as a babyface and the crowd in both Las Vegas and Anaheim booed him when they were supposed to cheer him. This would have played off De La Hoya vs. Mayweather's boxing match from May, which did 2.4 million buys and was, by leaps and bounds, the biggest event in the history of PPV. However, when he pitched the idea to De La Hoya, with the idea that exposure on WWE television would give him a new fan base that would then know the personalities and be interested in their planned September rematch, De La Hoya's people turned it down, not wanting to have anything to do with pro wrestling.

I was surprised at how little mainstream the Show/Mayweather angle got as

far as pub, although sometimes it takes the media a few days to get into

WWE celebrity angles. Last year with Donald Trump, at first we were surprised how little reaction it got, but it ended up being the most successful angle financially in company history. I won't say the biggest,

because historically, the stuff in 1984-85 that allowed the company to successfully go national would have been far more important, but economically it's dimes to dollars from those days. There is no word on what Mayweather Jr. is earning for the appearance .

Tyson was more hated in 1998 when he had a WWF run than Mayweather is today, but he was used as a heel much of his period until turning face by

turning on DX at Mania. WWE had used the same sales pitch that appearing

with them would increase their exposure, and thus help their buy rate when they boxed earlier this year with Evander Holyfield. But there is no

indication Holyfield doing WWE had any affect on his last buy rate, but that's also a far lower profile event. Few would argue that the WWE audience didn't greatly help the last UFC buy rate.

What is also interesting is that, thus far, there has been little or no sports media, particularly boxing media criticism of Mayweather Jr. for doing Wrestlemania, but that goes hand-in-hand with the lack of media interest up to this point in the angle.

Perhaps that is due to wrestling's lower profile in that there has been

the surprisingly little media coverage and buzz for it thus far. When Mike Tyson did Wrestlemania in 1998, there was talk of how much he was lowering himself by participating in wrestling. But wrestling was on fire at the time. However this past year, when WWE used Holyfield on a Saturday Night's Main Event, and granted, Holyfield is no longer a spotlight boxing star, but he is one of the most famous active boxers, it got virtually no outside attention nor criticism.

They established Mayweather Jr. early in the show as friends with Mysterio. Later, Mayweather Jr. and his entourage were at ringside during the Mysterio vs. Edge match. After Mysterio lost, the trainer and officials were tending to Mysterio, who was selling big on the floor. Show returned as a babyface, joking around, showing off his weight loss, claiming he'd dropped 108 pounds. He definitely looked like a new person.

Show talked about how he'd won titles on Raw, Smackdown and ECW, and it was inevitable he'd do it again. Then, he turned heel immediately, attacking the injured Mysterio and daring Mayweather Jr. to do something about it. He gave Mysterio a beating and was about to choke slam him when Mayweather Jr. and his entourage hit the ring. There was largely a pull-apart while Show shoved Mayweather Jr. Finally, Show got on his

knees and Mayweather Jr. threw a series of punches fairly stiff and accidentally broke his nose with an elbow as he was just throwing fast without looking at protecting the target. Then, Mayweather Jr. and his entourage all ran off down the aisle with Show chasing them. Show, who was stopped by Shane McMahon, was bleeding heavily from the nose and mouth. Mayweather Jr. had great in-ring presence and facials. The segment, which was rehearsed the night before at the Thomas & Mack, came off tremendous.

A. Kane pinned Shelton Benjamin in the dark match.

1. Chavo Guerrero retained the ECW title pinning C.M. Punk in 7:06.

Crowd

popped for Punk's ring entrance but was quiet for the match. Nothing wrong with the match but the ending seemed abrupt and people were hardly

expecting it. Punk tried a Go 2 sleep, but Guerrero turned it into a huracanrana and then followed with a tornado DDT out of the corner. Guerrero did the Eddy Guerrero dance to zero reaction, although they did

boo a three amigos. Punk did an enzuigiri and bulldog, but Guerrero made

the ropes on the pin attempt. The finish saw Punk go for a huracanrana off the top rope, but Guerrero held on and Punk took the bump. Guerrero then scored a clean pin with a frog splash. *1/2

2. Undertaker won the Smackdown elimination chamber match over Great Khali, Batista, MVP, Big Daddy V and Fit Finlay in 29:28. V looked

heavier than ever walking down. Even though he's probably about 6-7 or so, maybe even taller, he looked like a box. Batista started with Undertaker and ended with Undertaker, and those two pretty much were the match. Crowd was quiet. They didn't really figure out who they were for, but by the end of the five minutes, they started to boo Batista. V was in next and the match just sucked. But they got rid of him fast as Undertaker gave him a DDT on the metal outside the ring where the apron should be, and Batista pinned him in 9:07. Great Khali was in next. He was even worse. There was a loud groan when the crowd found out he was coming in. Not heat. The whole place was chanting "You can't wrestle" as he did nothing to prove them wrong. Khali did do the head squeeze on Batista. Batista escaped and later speared Khali. Undertaker kicked Ranjin Singh off the apron as he was on the other side of the cage, I guess to distract fans from Khali. Undertaker put Khali in the gogoplata. For a guy as over as Undertaker who has now been using the move to beat people, and who they even have the people bleed from the mouth to put the hold over, I don't think I've ever seen a less over finisher. First off, even MMA fans who watch UFC would have never seen the move. Khali tapped

at 12:38. Finlay was in next and gave Undertaker a Celtic cross for a near fall. Finlay knocked Undertaker's head through the glass that wasn't supposed to be breakable even by a bullet. MVP was in next, At first they did a spot were Undertaker was waiting for him, and he didn't want to get out of his pod. He used running kicks to Batista and Undertaker. He then took his chain off his neck and began choking Finlay with it. He hit Undertaker with his chain and Undertaker juiced. MVP went to the top of one of the pods, but Undertaker grabbed him by the throat and choke slammed him off the top, which looked to be a seven foot plus drop. Finlay pinned MVP in 22:31. Hornswoggle, who was under the ring, gave the shillelagh to Finlay, who hit Batista and Batista juiced. But Undertaker grabbed Finlay and choke slammed him over the top rope onto the metal mesh apron and pinned hi min 24:11. This left Undertaker vs. Batista. At this point, the crowd was almost completely with Undertaker and Batista's offense was getting booed. Usual good stuff from them, as Undertaker kicked out of a Batista bomb. Undertaker used a last ride but was too slow to cover and Batista kicked out. Both guys were bleeding. Batista had Undertaker on his shoulder and threw him into the cage. Batista

then

picked Undertaker up again like he would be doing a shoulder breaker or

a

Davey Boy Smith style powerslam, but in a cool reversal, Undertaker turned it into the tombstone piledriver for the clean win. The last few minutes were good but overall the second weakest elimination chamber match WWE has put on. **3/4

Edge was backstage with Curt Hawkins and Zack Ryder. They noted Vickie Guerrero was injured when Mysterio Thesz pressed her out of her wheelchair on Smackdown. Edge was looking a lot bigger. With Guerrero out, Teddy Long was in charge and he banned Hawkins and Ryder from ringside.

3. Ric Flair beat Mr. Kennedy in 7:13. Kennedy used a dropkick to the knee and spent most of the match working on Flair's knees. Flair's selling was great. Kennedy used the figure four leglock around the ringpost spot Bret Hart made famous. Kennedy used his forward slam for a

near all. Kennedy tried to get the in using the ropes but ref Charles Robinson caught him. Flair got the figure four in the middle to win via tap out. **1/4

4. Edge pinned Rey Mysterio in 5:27 to retain the world title. Edge mostly worked on Mysterio's bad right arm, including throwing him into te

ring steps. Mysterio was selling the arm strong. Mysterio used a moonsault block for a near and later a 619, and that had to hurt.

Finish

saw Mysterio come off the top with a springboard move but Edge hit him with a spear for the clean win. *1/4

Next was the Big Show angle with Mayweather Jr. Mayweather shouldn't have

had his entourage with him when he came to the ring because it created the dynamic where the person who was supposed to be the face had an in-ring visual seven or so on-one on the heel. People weren't going to cheer him that much anyway, and it felt more like people saw him as an outsider intruder on their entertainment. Plus, all those guys running away doesn't exactly make Show into a heel either.

5. John Cena beat Randy Orton via DQ for slapping the ref in 15:51 so Orton retained the WWE title. This match had far more atmosphere than anything up to this point, with the dueling chants from the start. Cena was nowhere close to 100% and it showed, but they scripted enough diversions that the match was never slow, but lots of shortcuts to kill time and limit what Cena would have to do. Cena's brawling looked out of

kilter, and that was mostly what he was doing. Crowd picked up as the match went on. Cena went for the FU but Orton got out and began stomping

Cena's ankles. Cena at this point was getting a mixed reaction, probably

with slightly more cheering. They teased a double count out spot where both jumped into the ring right before 10. Cena got the STFU in the middle, but Orton managed to crawl to the ropes. Orton then rolled out of

the ring and told referee Mike Chioda to count him out. Cena went out there and Orton out of nowhere gave him an RKO on the floor. Orton got in

the ring and told the ref to count Cena out. Cena barely got in and started a comeback, until Orton slapped Chioda, who called for the DQ.

Finish was lame for a \$39.95 show advertised main event. Post-match saw Cena lay Orton out with the FU. **1/4

6. HHH won the Raw elimination chamber over Jeff Hardy, JBL, Umaga, Shawn

Michaels and Chris Jericho in 23:54. By this point, they were running way

late. They ended about 15 minutes later than usual, and that's with shaving the five minute periods in this chamber to just over four minutes. Michaels and Jericho opened. They did some good wrestling sequences. Michaels came off the top with a flying elbow and Jericho got

his knees up. Jericho then did his lionsault and Michaels got his knees up. There was a collision where it looked like Jericho got his elbow in Michaels' face, and he was all busted up hard way again. Umaga was next in and got both guys on his shoulder and did a double Samoan drop. That was too much of a babyface spot but looked great. He missed a splash off

the top and then Michaels hit him with an elbow drop. JBL followed and then HHH. Jericho pinned JBL for the first elimination in 13:44 with the

codebreaker. JBL then laid out Jericho, Michaels and Umaga with chair

shots before he left. At least Jericho and Michaels got their hands up to protect but Umaga took it flush on the head and these were hard shots. Jericho juiced from the chair shot and Michaels was bleeding all over the place. Hardy finally came in and used the whisper in the wind on HHH and Michaels. Michaels superkicked Umaga, and then Jericho used a lionsault, HHH did a pedigree and finally Hardy did a swanton off the top of the pod to pin Umaga in 19:45. Michaels superkicked Jericho and Hardy pinned him in 19:57. Hardy did a twist of fate on Michaels and then HHH pinned Michaels after a pedigree in 20:25. Hardy used a DDT on the metal and HHH came up juiced. Hardy came off the top rope but HHH kicked him in the gut. Hardy came back, but when missed a swanton and HHH hit the pedigree. Hardy kicked out of the pedigree which got a huge pop. Hardy used a low blow and a twist of fate, but HHH kicked out. Hardy tried a twist of fate on a chair HHH brought in, but HHH blocked it and used a pedigree on the chair for the pin. The crowd went flat as by this point they were wanting

Hardy. They went to the big wide shot that they do whenever a face wins
a

good match and you could see it was dead. ****

Negotiations for the rights to Smackdown starting in the 2008-09 season
have come down to either MyNetworkTV or Tribune Broadcasting according
to

an article in TV Week.

This means all the major networks, as well as NBC International cable
stations USA, Bravo and Sci-Fi did not express serious interest in a
show

that would have significantly elevated the ratings of all three. In the
case of USA, the lack of interest was understandable, as they are
already

No. 1 and the last thing they would want was to be branded as the WWE
Network, which is where wrestling's image was a negative. Had WWE
maintained its relationship with Spike, this very likely would have
been

different since Spike at times airs a ridiculous amount of
significantly

lower-rated UFC programming in prime time. Bravo is a bad fit, since
it's

primarily aimed at women and is more of an arts channel. Sci-Fi is a
technical bad fit, but has had success with ECW and this would be a
significantly stronger show.

The fact such a highly-rated property, with relatively low costs, and a

decade of becoming an institution to at least a core audience would have

so few stations seriously chasing it is a sign of WWE's lone Achilles heel. And to a degree, that's the same for UFC and even bigger for TNA.

The history of this industry is often written by television executives who make decisions with little knowledge or caring of the product. Raw seems safe because of ratings, but there is always the chance someone will be put in charge of USA who hates wrestling and believes the network, with more and more original hits, has outgrown it. Yes, it would

still be an incredibly valuable franchise, but when Spike cut it loose, aside from USA, due to Bonnie Hammer, who may not be there forever, there

was shockingly little interest in something that could turn a station's fortune around. ECW got on Sci-Fi largely due to Hammer, who is no longer

running the station.

The Tribune deal would be for WGN, and negotiations indicate that USA must have given the okay when turning it down, because WWE had signed an

exclusive cable deal in 2005 with the NBC Universal family when moving Raw from Spike TV.

For Smackdown, on the surface, it would appear to be bad news, because the status of WWE having a show on what would be considered a major broadcast network would be gone, unless Smackdown itself spurs

MyNetwork

to credibility. MyNetwork, like Ion, is a collection of broadcast stations around the country, but is of so low profile that the fast nationals don't track it and when the network ratings from top-to-bottom are listed, MyNetwork isn't even figured in.

As noted last week, a move to another night of the week on MyNetwork could result in the audience actually growing from the 2.6 to 2.9 rating

level the show has been doing in recent months on Friday. If it were to stay on Friday, which makes no sense for either side, the move would be expected to hurt the ratings somewhat, but perhaps not all that significantly. At this point, because the show will be the star ratings property no matter which side picks it up, it really is time to make the move to live on Tuesday, but that would require Sci-Fi moving ECW, so Thursday would be more likely.

The show did consistently stronger numbers on Thursday, a far better viewership night, during its UPN run. And a large percentage of the MyNetwork affiliates are the same stations that formerly made up UPN, although they are now far weaker in prime time. Still, historically, major league pro wrestling's numbers don't vary nearly as much as most regular programming based on the station. WWE didn't do better on NBC than on CW or USA. WWE didn't improve at all going from a lower profile Spike to a higher profile USA in late 2005. The marginal increase this year in Smackdown ratings from UPN to CW represents simply that CW in this past TV season was in five percent more homes than UPN was last

season, because a network rating is figured on a percentage of all the television homes in the country.

MyNetwork is available in roughly the same number of homes as CW, although it is not taken seriously as a network. Smackdown would immediately become the top program on the network, and thus also have the advantage of the lion's share of promotion and status internally as the potential network savior. For CW, while it was among the highest rated shows, it was not among the most heavily promoted or considered outwardly as a star show.

Tribune recently signed Ed Wilson, the former president of Fox, to run the entire Tribune broadcast division. Tribune's main properties in television are owning 23 television stations. Wilson's goal has been to build WGN to a TBS level Superstation. The national WGN is not a top-25 cable station.

The only option would appear to be the national version of the WGN Superstation. WGN was in negotiations for TNA in early 2005 for a Monday night time slot that would have opposed Raw, a deal that came close to closing, but TNA pulled out of talks when Spike opened up negotiations, which turned out to be the greatest blessing the company ever had. At the time, if TNA did a 0.5 rating in prime time, that was going to be considered a success.

The major problem with WGN is lack of clearance, plus it historically

doesn't pay much for programming. The station is currently in about 71 million of the 112.8 million homes in the country, but that's misleading

because it includes the stations in the Chicago market that get WGN, and

Smackdown may not air in the Chicago market, at least in prime time on a

weeknight because the Chicago market version of WGN carries CW programming. It is not particularly strong among cable TV as most of the

major market cable systems, particularly in the Northeast, don't carry it. A large percentage of its outside Chicago coverage is to dish owners.

Smackdown would be valuable in an attempt to grow the station because having a popular show that there would be some demand for would aid in getting clearances on cable systems, but that can be a slow process.

Luckily, the U.S. is still WWE's prime market, but WWE's profits no longer depend on the U.S. being strong.

In per-capita popularity, the U.S. is only the 10th most popular country

for the Smackdown brand based on where web traffic comes from (Portugal,

New Zealand, U.K. and Australia are per capita the most popular) and no city in North America has per capita popularity of the Smackdown brand in

the top ten among major cities in the world. Smackdown's top ten right

now are Lisbon, Portugal; Birmingham, UK; Auckland, New Zealand; Manchester, UK; Melbourne; Sydney; Brentford, UK; Lima, Peru; Milan, Italy; and Madrid, Spain. It's also stronger in the major cities in Mexico due to Rey Mysterio.

But it would be a huge blow for Smackdown in the U.S., which needs coverage to get its personalities and angles over to be a touring brand.

Most likely, if they go with WGN, there would probably be more emphasis on bringing Smackdown stars on occasion to Raw for the exposure, and focusing on building some Smackdown angles during the more watched Raw programming. Because of this, from a WWE standpoint, MyNetwork—which draws a much larger viewership right now, and has significantly more clearances, has to be the odds-on favorite. But on the flip side, MyNetwork easily may not be around in another year or two, while WGN as a Superstation seems far more stable for the long haul.

WGN may be being used simply to make sure MyNetwork doesn't lowball them based on the company having no other options.

MyNetwork is in about 105 million homes, while USA is in 96.4 million and Spike is in 95.8 million.

On WGN, it would almost surely be moved from Friday night because the station broadcasts Chicago Cubs and White Sox games often on Friday nights during the summer, and on occasion broadcasts the Chicago Bulls on

Fridays, whereas it rarely broadcasts those teams on Thursdays on the national feed. A two-hour Smackdown show may air in a regular time slot outside of prime time on the Chicago version of the station, but when Smackdown has been pre-empted in the market due to sports and airs out of prime time, it has never done strong numbers.

There was more information that came out in the final 400-page police report on the Benoit family killings.

Phone records showed a call being made on the family phone at 9:25 p.m. on 6/22 (the night Nancy is believed to have been murdered) to 411, with

the caller asking for the number of the Fayetteville Police Department.

However, none of the phones in the Benoit house subsequently called the police department, nor did the police get any calls that night regarding

the incident. The police believe Nancy made the 411 call, because minutes

later she called her neighbor, Holly Schrepfer and left a message. The police can't figure out why she didn't call 911. The theory that Daniel may have made the call, mistakenly calling 411 instead of 911 and then not knowing what to do next seems unlikely, because at 9:32 p.m., and again a minute later, Nancy called and left a message for Schrepfer. It has not been ruled out completely because he was a seven-year-old who may

have not known what to do and been unable to then process calling a

second number.

Schrepfer had told the police Nancy called her at about 9:30 p.m. on Friday night. She noted she got a phone call from what she thought was Nancy, but didn't answer it. Police believe Nancy was killed shortly after the calls were made. No phone calls were made from the home, nor were any calls made to the home until 3:01 p.m. the next day when Schrepfer called, leaving a message that she was returning Nancy's call from the night before. Schrepfer and Chris Benoit did talk, with Chris explaining that Nancy and Daniel had food poisoning, between the period it is believed he killed them and when he killed himself. She said that she thought Chris was acting strange, going into a very detailed explanation of their supposed illnesses.

On 6/23, after it is believed Daniel was dead, a phone call was made to Delta Airlines where Chris changed his reservation for a flight to get into Houston for the PPV on 6/24.

Schrepfer was the neighbor police called to investigate the house because

the guard dogs in the backyard wouldn't let them in. They knew Schrepfer,

and allowed her in, and she put the dogs in the kennel, allowing the police to come in. She was with them when they discovered the three bodies and left the house screaming. She then left Atlanta and the media

furor to hide out in Boston.

The report says it is apparent Benoit at that time was planning to leave

his home after Nancy and Daniel were killed and make sure not to miss his scheduled wrestling match. But police believe he changed his mind about going to Houston, and then decided to kill himself. He put his dogs outside, sent text messages to Chavo Guerrero and Scott Armstrong to give them his home address and tell them the dogs were outside.

Pam Clark told police that in Nancy's last conversation with her a few days before her death, she said she felt like she didn't know Chris anymore and that he had been acting strange and his mood swings had gotten so bad he would pick fights with her over nothing. Clark told police Nancy made her promise that if anything happened, to make sure Chris was investigated.

Dr. Phil Astin III had prescribed Nancy 360 hydrocodone (Lorcet) pills in the weeks before her death, 120 on 5/30, 120 more on 6/9 and a third refill of 120 on 6/19, so she and/or Chris had taken 279 pills in just over three weeks. Two of the bottles were found empty in the medicine cabinet. 81 of those pills were still in the third bottle.

Astin told police that when Benoit saw him the afternoon of 6/22, that he didn't appear to be depressed, nervous or anxious. He came complaining about physical pain and muscle spasms.

A check of Benoit's computer in the office, where Nancy's body was found,

showed someone on 6/23, after Nancy was dead, almost surely Chris, went

on the computer to do an internet search on the Prophet Elijah. The feeling is after he had killed Nancy, and possibly Daniel (police believe

Daniel died on that day, but couldn't conclusively establish a time close

to enough to know if it was before or after Chris was on the computer), he started thinking of religion, which the police felt may explain why he

placed Bibles next to both bodies. In the First Book of Elijah, Chapter 17, Elijah is sent to a widow. The son of the widow has died and Elijah takes the child from the mother and stretches out on him three times

in his own bed. Elijah pleads to God to restore the boy's soul to his body, which he does, and Elijah returns the body to the widow.

Nancy's body was found lying on the floor, all covered up with a Bible next to her head.

Police don't even speculate why he killed Daniel in the report. The conclusion on killing Nancy is that prolonged prescription medication use

by both and changes in Chris' brain due to the concussions and possibly the long-term steroid use may have caused behavioral changes in Chris which led to him being distant and/or causing aggressive behavior and said there was evidence of violence just before Nancy's death.

There are a few notes to keep in mind when it comes to the story and what

has come out over the past week plus. I believe the three women closest

to Nancy at the time of her death were being as honest as possible and accurate in describing phone conversations. In particular, Sandra Toffoloni, Nancy's sister, who idolized Nancy and treated Daniel like one of her own, often stayed as a guest at the house and first-hand observed a lot. That's why the Toffoloni family apparently has not accepted the idea that Chris killed Daniel out of mercy because he was saving him for a horrible life after her mother died—although nobody has come up with any other reason anyone can accept. But the key is, and this is hard to speak badly of the victim, but as Schrepfer, her friend, made clear, Nancy was abusing prescription drugs and alcohol at the time of her death. Much of what she told her friends in the days before her death could be paranoia speaking. And considering Chris over the last year before his death moved the family, rerouted all the mail coming to the house to a dummy address, would take different routes home from the airport because he believed he was being followed, and didn't want his life outside the house after 5 p.m. at night, that paranoia likely goes double for what Nancy was living with. Regarding the affair with the Diva, that comes to a Diva who called the house and Chris went outside to take the call. While there is a name currently on the roster that some have speculated about, from all accounts, if there was a relationship (and several companies insiders were very skeptical that such a thing could have been kept hidden), the name that was speculated on, it would

have had to have been over by, at a minimum, eight months before the weekend in question.

The point is, people who are in relationships that have major ups and downs vent to friends, and some women and men greatly exaggerate the faults to get a sympathetic ear. When you throw alcohol and prescription

drug abuse into the fray, I'd say the chances of that magnify greatly.

When police checked out all three women as witnesses, the stories weren't

contradictory and their memories of phone conversations based on phone call records of the home phone turned out completely accurate. But it was

also a woman in her own questionable state clearly mad about things in her marriage venting to her three closest friends. And those three close

friends know that same husband murdered their friend. Nevertheless, this

is the best evidence out there as to any sort of problems or motivation.

But when it comes to the biggest wrestling story in many ways that we've

ever covered, and probably ever will cover. It's been also, by far, the most difficult, because you are dealing with someone who was, on one hand, one of the greatest performers in the business, and from my own dealings and from 90% of the people who came in contact with him, you'd say he was one of the nicest, most humble and hardest working man in

the

industry, who overcame a lot of obstacles and a lot of people not believing due to his size and perceived lack of charisma that he could ever make it as a big star, and he did. Yet this same person committed this horrible crime, and worse, it did not completely surprise people who

were close and knew about the combustible marriage he had and his dark side that he kept from all but his closest friends.

I think we've gotten as much evidence and as many answers as we're ever going to get. And as was figured from the start, it will never make sense, never be explainable and you can only beat yourself up so much trying to come up with answers that aren't there before accepting that it

will never fit into a simple explanation, even though many will, for convenience or their own self interests, try to pin it on one thing instead of a combination of everything.

There is a strong possibility of a lawsuit coming from both sides of the

family against WWE, which WWE will defend vigorously. Many companies would do a quick settlement to avoid the bad publicity from a suit.

It's

possible WWE will at the end, but they've given all indications they will

fight the idea to the end that they were at fault in any way. Both the steroids, which will attack the credibility of the drug testing program,

and particularly the concussions, could be involved in the lawsuit, but public indications are they will not go after the steroid angle. The concussions as a factor will likely be derided as junk science by Jerry McDevitt and that explains why Vince on CNN was so negative when that was

brought up, because those do point directly to the product. The major argument is there was a clear diagnosis of significant brain damage in all four lobes of Benoit's brain, to a worse degree than any of the NFL players examined who all had serious antisocial issues later in life.

But

even with it being likely there are many athletes in sports like football, pro wrestling and ice hockey who received multiple concussions

in their career, and many examples of certain behavioral problems later in life, not one can be connected to such a crime.

"I think this absolutely, positively proves this was a domestic dispute,"

said WWE attorney John Taylor to the Atlanta Journal Constitution, hoping

to jump on the theory that Nancy was going to leave as the explanation for the murder. "There is a clear motive for murder here. This is not the product of concussions or steroids."

However, the police report suggests both concussions and/or steroids as a

potential cause, as well as a domestic dispute. It specifically states

there is no explanation for the murder of Daniel. Michael Benoit is claiming WWE was at fault for not taking care of the numerous concussions

his son suffered, claiming the concussions are the missing explanation for what is unanswerable. It is a belief corroborated publicly on "The Fifth Estate" by the doctors who examined his brain and Chris Nowinski, the former WWE wrestler who has become an expert on the subject of concussions in sports. Nowinski's own wrestling career ended after a series of concussions. Prior to wrestling with WWE, he had his own history of concussions dating back to being a star football player at Harvard.

With Wrestlemania on the horizon, it was no surprise Hulk Hogan would surface with a tease of coming back to work with a rival organization. It's become almost an annual ploy since WCW went out of business. Hogan talks of either starting his own promotion, or teases going full-time to a promotion (he did this with both the XWF, and TNA, to the point the former was ready to become practically the Hulk Hogan Wrestling Federation until he got cold feet and instead ended up in WWE; the latter he even did an angle in Japan with Jeff Jarrett and promos, before a knee injury popped up and somehow the deal fell through). Hogan told The Sun in the U.K. this past week that he was a few days away

from starting a new promotion, working with Eric Bischoff. It has been known Bischoff and Hogan have talked of starting a new company for a long time. Obviously the talks became more serious when Bischoff's WWE contract expired. At different times, wrestlers and other personnel had been contacted, but nothing ever came of it. With both Hogan and Bischoff having successful reality shows on VH-1 (Bischoff put together the deal for "Scott Baio at 45"), and "Hogan Knows Best" being the highest rated reality show in the history of the station, obviously that network would have some interest. The idea of doing a national touring promotion using Hogan and Paul Wight (Big Show) as the headliners was heavily talked about, and they used the Memphis show last year to kick off the idea. What Memphis had that no other city in the country had is a weekly wrestling television show that still has a substantial audience to promote off, and a local promoter who is higher profile in the community than any other city. The original idea was Hogan vs. Jerry Lawler, but when that fell through, Wight came on board, and the show only did 2,200 paid at the Fed Ex Forum. At that point, egos were bruised and Hogan has always been very careful to avoid association with failure (he left WWF in 1993 when he thought they were going down, although he was under

contract to WCW when it collapsed, although he was no longer appearing in

the last several months of that company) when making his decisions.

A few days later, Hogan was at the MTV News Studios and instead of pitching the idea that he was going to start his own company, pitched the

idea of doing Wrestlemania, suggesting a retirement match with Ric Flair

with Vince McMahon as referee, saying Wrestlemania needed a main event bad, and noting they have a lot of tickets left to sell (Orlando hasn't been the immediate sellout of the past dozen or so years, but 60,000

tickets sold five weeks in advance isn't exactly hurting). He first

pushed the idea of a match with Steve Austin, trying to goad Austin

("He don't want none") into a match where it appears to me Austin takes great

pleasure in not doing.

The other strongest indication, besides history, that this is unlikely to

go anywhere is Hogan's good friend and prospective top opponent if he was

going to go on his own, Big Show, signed with WWE. Show made the move when he believed Hogan had nothing for him, and also wasn't going to be there to promote his prospective boxing career.

Linda Bollea told us last year that Hogan and Bischoff would be starting

something up, but at that point the idea was not to compete with Vince McMahon in North America, but run shows internationally, where it would be easier to draw as a novelty product, and in many countries that

Hogan

had never wrestled in. Last year, those with long-time relationships with

Hogan and Jimmy Hart were contacted and told they would be doing international tours that Bischoff would be putting together, but nothing

materialized, which at the time was believed to have been because Bischoff couldn't lock in the financial backing. We hadn't heard of anyone being contacted that something was ready to happen and it's almost

impossible to keep something like this quiet in wrestling.

There are major problems, the key being talent. Yes, there are Hogan's 80s contemporaries, like The Nasty Boys, Greg Valentine, Brutus Beefcake,

Honky Tonk Man, Jimmy Hart and the like who are available, but they are all old now and a nostalgia wrestling federation would likely only have very short shelf life on television. There is not a huge crew of talented

wrestlers who can be stars in such a federation who compete in Japan or Mexico, like in periods in the past, who can be introduced to the U.S. audience and click.

In Linda Bollea's court filings, she did talk about a LLC business set up

that she believed Hulk had earmarked \$1.5 million to that Bischoff would

be in charge of the money. But that money is literally a drop in the bucket for what would be needed to run pro wrestling today. With Hogan's

assets potentially to be split in a divorce, and facing an expected huge

lawsuit due to John Graziano's injuries in the car accident with Nick, Hulk's financial situation is such that putting his own money into a high-risk wrestling start-up would be out of character for someone who has been smart with his money. In fact, all of these factors were such that if it had not been for him getting the "American Gladiators"

hosting gig, I'd have expected him in WWE.

"Last night (which would have been 2/14) me and Eric were getting ready to sign a deal with one of the TV networks here in America," Hogan told The Sun. We had a little bit of a problem with the licensing and merchandising, which has delayed it. But I totally expect we're going to

sign the TV portion of this very soon, because there's no point in starting any sort of wrestling organization without the TV locked in place. . Once we've wrapped the TV up, we'll make the official announcement. The network wants to make a really big deal of it."

Hogan noted there were a lot of unhappy wrestlers in WWE, which is true,

but those unhappy wrestlers are making huge money with a company on a

roll. There may be some who have saved money and want to get off the hard

travel grind, but for those, TNA is already there, established and is stable. Many of those who left in recent years decided against continuing

in pro wrestling as opposed to going to TNA. And even with an easier schedule and, if you were a WWE star, basically a guarantee if you jumped

to TNA you'd have a higher position on the card locked, only three wrestlers of any significance have done so in the past two years—Christian Cage, who had been buried in a jobber role despite getting big reactions in WWE, who also wanted to pursue acting that the WWE schedule wouldn't allow, and he was practically guaranteed a world title run; Kurt Angle, who WWE really wanted to get rid of; and Booker T,

who is 42, has saved his money and had tired of the politics and ultimately split over being suspended, he believed, unfairly.

Hogan knocked WWE programming, saying, "I'm a fan, but it is pretty boring programming. It's watered down and unexciting, and the viewer doesn't have any option except to have it shoved down his throat. We're going to have a lot of back story for viewers to understand why these people are doing what they're doing. It won't be family members in the back writing storylines on things they know nothing about."

The future of Yuji Nagata, one of Japan's top pro wrestlers of the past decade, was in question when he suddenly lost strength in the left side

of his body while training before a scheduled match on 2/17 at Tokyo

Sumo

Hall.

Nagata, 39, a two-time IWGP heavyweight champion, who faced Kurt Angle

on

the 1/4 Tokyo Dome show in a match broadcast on Spike TV, said he had

suffered dizzy spells two months earlier and was checked out, but got a

clean bill of health. He stated that on 2/14, he once again suffered

from

dizzy spells, but ignored them.

He came to Sumo Hall early to train, before a scheduled match against

Hirooki Goto. He once again started getting dizzy while training, and

lost strength in both his left arm and left leg. He was able to talk

normally, but there was fear he had suffered a stroke and he was rushed

to the hospital. Test results from an MRI came back negative for a

stroke, but he was to remain in the hospital for more testing. At press

time, MRI testing showed no abnormalities in his brain, nor any

problems

with his neck, and it was a mystery why he has been having these

problems. He was to remain in the hospital, and to undergo more

testing,

including blood testing, after press time.

There was fear his situation could be similar to Yoshihiro Takayama,

who

had to sit out two years after brain injuries suffered from years of

stiff beatings in both pro wrestling and MMA.

Nagata twice fought MMA, losing via knockout quickly to Mirko Cro Cop and

Fedor Emelianenko. A former multiple time collegiate wrestling champion in Japan, Nagata represented Japan in international competition in the early 1990s, in both the Asian games, the teenage World Cup in 1988, and

in the 1991 World championships. He began training with New Japan after losing in the 1992 Olympic trials in a training camp that included amateur wrestling stars Kazuyuki Fujita, Tokimitsu Ishizawa (Kendo Kashin) and Manabu Nakanishi, all of whom later did MMA. He debuted that

September and ended up as the best pro wrestler of the group. He became a

star in late 1995 during the New Japan vs. UWFI feud, where he faced off

with Kazushi Sakuraba. The peak of his career was his first IWGP title reign, one of the longest in history, starting from beating Tadao Yasuda

on April 5, 2002, at Budokan Hall, and losing to Yoshihiro Takayama on May 2, 2003, at the Tokyo Dome. He held the title a second time last year, from 4/13 to 10/8, both winning and losing to Hiroshi Tanahashi.

His brother, Katsuhiko Nagata, who is currently an MMA fighter under contract with Fighting Entertainment Groups (K-1) after formerly being under New Japan contract, was a silver medalist in Greco-Roman wrestling

in the 2000 Olympics at 152 pounds.

Johnny Weaver, the most popular wrestler in the Carolinas during the 60s and early 70s, passed away on 2/15 from a heart attack at the age of 72.

Weaver, born Kenneth Eugene Weaver in East St. Louis, IL, started working for Jim Crockett Promotions in 1962, and for the most part, never left. He ran the gamut, starting off as being the good looking, clean-cut All-American babyface family man, boy next door type star. He had the beautiful wife, female wrestling star Penny Banner, who he often did mixed tag team matches with. But Weaver was also well known, like most of the wrestlers from his era, as a heavy drinker and ladies man, who as a top babyface in a territory where lots of women attended the matches, was filled with temptation. By 1964, he was the regular partner of George Becker, an aging local legend who had been a wrestling star since the late 30s. Even though it has been nearly 37 years since the two teamed, Weaver is probably best known in the Carolinas for the Becker & Weaver tag team, which had an eight year run as the top babyface tag team in the territory. He grew into the area's top babyface, as the master of the sleeper hold. He had many memorable matches against the world champions of that era

when they would come into the territory, including Lou Thesz, Gene Kiniski, Jack Brisco, and his biggest title match program with Dory Funk

Jr. When Funk Jr. was champion, he also worked a main event program with

Brisco over the supposed worldwide No. 1 contender spot.

In the mid-70s, when George Scott came in as booker, he tried to reinvent

the territory around singles stars like Wahoo McDaniel and Johnny Valentine, and later Ric Flair. Weaver was still a star but no longer a headliner or the focal point on the babyface side. He grew into the role

as the veteran who did the color commentary on television, who would get

involved in an angle every so often for a big run.

He joked that it all went fast. One day it was women all over him and then suddenly it was ten years later, and women would still be coming up

to him, only asking him if he could introduce them to Ricky Steamboat or

Ric Flair. Soon, he was "The Dean of Wrestling," a gatekeeper of sorts who would be the veteran to put a new top heel over as his first program

when he came into a territory, giving the heel instant credibility. He was the key guy who originally got Greg Valentine, Roddy Piper and Tully

Blanchard over in each man's first major program in the territory. His last major singles run came in 1978, doing a sleeper vs. claw feud over the NWA TV championship with Baron Von Raschke. The next year he joined Rich Landrum as hosts of NWA World Wide Wrestling, the flagship television show of the promotion. He continued as color commentator working with the likes of David Crockett and Bob Caudle. He wrestled full-time until 1984, finishing up doing a program where he unmasked

The

Assassin (Jody Hamilton), who was part of the masked Bolos tag team he feuded with 22 years earlier, and even did matches where everybody knew who he was, wearing the mask of The Assassin, and the Ultimate Assassin.

After retirement, he was brought back for a final program in 1987,

where

he taught Dusty Rhodes the sleeper hold, which was renamed by Rhodes as "The Weaverlock," as a new weapon for a singles feud with Lex Luger.

The

angle also included bringing back Hiro Matsuda, who was Weaver's big singles rival nearly two decades earlier in the Carolinas, as Luger's manager and they did a few tag team and singles matches. Weaver also worked a few matches with J.J. Dillon, the manager of the Four Horsemen.

He worked for Jim Crockett Promotions after retiring from the ring,

doing

some announcing and working in the office until the company was sold to Turner Broadcasting in November 1988. Weaver was offered a job, but

they

wanted him to move from Charlotte to Atlanta. Instead, with his connections in the police department from 36 years in the city, at the age of 53, he took the basic law enforcement test and was hired as a deputy in the Mecklenberg County Sheriff's Department.

His job was to transport prisoners, around the state and he was the man for the job, because he knew every road in the state from his years of traveling to all the small towns as a wrestler, as well as knew every restaurant no matter where the trip would go.

"He has always known he had an iffy heart," said Banner, who was legally

married to him at the top of his death, although the two had not spoken in more than 13 years after a violent break-up of a marriage that played

out in front of the cameras like the All-American couple but was always stormy. "But he always took care of himself, keeping in shape by walking

at least three or four times a week. He was just at the doctor on the 13th and all was well. The day before he passed, neighbors said he was out raking in the yard and also walked."

Banner, who had a daughter, Wendi, with Weaver, said that Weaver got up on Friday morning, brought in the newspaper, made a phone call to someone

at 7 a.m. and started doing the crossword puzzle. He had only a few months left with the department until retirement and was telling anyone who asked how much he was looking forward to it. He was also scheduled

to

be inducted into the Mid Atlantic Wrestling Hall of Fame this summer.

When he didn't arrive for work at 11:30 a.m., and he was always on time

for work, two deputies went to the house and found him on the kitchen

floor and called the ambulance. He was pronounced dead at the hospital.

Weaver & Becker were the area's main event babyface team, working with

the likes of The Anderson Brothers (Gene & Ole & Lars), Rip Hawk &

Swede

Hanson, The Bolos (who were later The Assassins), Bronko Lubich & Aldo

Bogni, The Infernos, and Brute Bernard & The Missouri Mauler until

1971,

when Becker was nearly 60 and couldn't do much in the ring. Weaver

tried

to save Becker's job, arguing that Becker's name was still strong and

he

could handle the workload in the ring.

"Everything was getting more expensive and they were thinking that they

needed a change in the booking office, and I don't know why," said

Weaver

in an interview on the Mid Atlantic Gateway web site. "I told them, I

don't know why you just, as long as he can still get in the ring and

you

can put his name on the marquee, I'll do the rest. His name always

drew.

But they wanted to move him out and he wouldn't go for that."

Weaver, who wrestled under the name Johnny Ace , wearing a ring jacket

decorated with black aces, early in his career in the Central States territory, got his first major break in the Indianapolis territory in the late 1959, run by Jim Barnett. Barnett saw Weaver wrestle Verne Gagne on a tape of a television match in Sioux City IA, which was booked out of the Gust Karras office in St. Joseph, MO. Barnett contacted Karras and brought Weaver in, but didn't like the name Johnny Ace, and when he found out Weaver was his real last name, changed him to Johnny Weaver, which stuck for the rest of his life. Barnett thought he resembled Sonny Myers, one of the top wrestlers of the era, so he changed Myers to Sonny Weaver and made them a brother tag team combination.

We'll have a full look at Weaver's career in next week's issue.

HD-Net Fights, the Mark Cuban owned fight company, filed suit in U.S. District Court in Dallas to get the court to make a ruling on Randy Couture's fight contract.

The company, by filing the suit, the object of which to get a legal ruling as to how long Couture's contract would be in effect, makes it appear they will aggressively pursue making the Couture vs. Fedor Emelianenko fight.

HD-Net is hopeful of getting a court ruling that Couture would be free of

his fight contract on 7/19, which would be the end of the four fight,

18

months, and at that time they would begin promotion of a Couture vs. Fedor Emelianenko match. Zuffa is claiming that because Couture owes them

two more fights and they have diligently attempted to book him for championship defenses, that based on the retirement clause, it freezes the time limit. Plus, Zuffa is going to likely argue that a Dallas court

isn't the correct venue, given that Couture lives in Las Vegas, UFC is based in Las Vegas, and UFC contracts specify legal action has to be taken in Nevada.

There may also be a champions clause, where the fighter can't leave the company while still holding the championship belt as the contract have a

company option until the champion loses the title. Couture claims he has

relinquished the title based on his quitting the company, but UFC has continued to recognize him as champion and make public statements of trying to get him to defend the title.

Couture was on HD-Net's "Inside MMA" on 2/15 and he expressed optimism the court would rule that his fight contract expires in July. He said that ideally he would like the match with Emelianenko to take place in the fall. The match would be the biggest potential non-UFC match ever held in North America and would likely give an answer to the question as

to whether it's only UFC that is popular, or if it is the sport of MMA.

The fact is, live MMA events around the country seem to be drawing better

than ever, but those are mainly promotions who build around local names.

No organization has successfully translated that to PPV. It's all speculation as to whether such a match would do 75,000 buys or 500,000, and where it did in that realm will determine a lot about UFC's dominance

of the industry for at least the short-term.

Filing the lawsuit also makes it clear that it is Cuban's company that is

the current frontrunner to promote the match. They can build it on their

television shows, but the negative is they are only available in a few million homes, and the number of people who actually watch their MMA shows has to be tiny. However, promoting such a fight immediately puts the fight company on the map, and increases the profile of the station that they are hoping to score huge growth in as more homes get HD capability over the next year, and it is clear MMA is one of their key tickets to growth, very similar to how pro wrestling helped build both TBS and USA.

UFC filed a letter legally stating that UFC was freezing the 18 month time limit on the contract for the duration of Couture's retirement.

Couture made it clear in every public statement he was not retiring, because that would legally freeze the term.

A second legal action involving Couture was filed last week by Zuffa attempting to get an injunction barring him from appearing at the 2/29 IFL show at the Orleans Arena in Las Vegas. Zuffa's side has a 3/4 court date, and for obvious reasons, is trying to move it up.

This stems from the original lawsuit, where they claimed a one-year non-compete on his employment contract that he resigned from on 10/11, and Couture has publicly stated he wouldn't do anything to breach that non-compete by fighting or being a participant on a show until October 11, 2008.

The story is that the IFL, supposedly without asking Couture, put Couture's photo on its web site when promoting Team Xtreme Couture fighting on the show. The story we were told is Couture found out and told them to immediately take it down as he couldn't be part of any of the promotion for rival shows. They took it down, but Zuffa captured a screen image of it and used it in filing for the injunction, saying it constituted "direct or indirect competition" to UFC. Couture has always maintained his personal business is separate from the Xtreme Couture gym business, and Shawn Tompkins, and not himself, is coaching the IFL team.

Zuffa is arguing the opposite trying to get a ruling that would prevent the IFL from having a Team Xtreme Couture. However, Couture was planning on being in the corner at the show.

The 90-page injunction said that "If Couture is permitted to terminate

his employment and promptly take his well-known name and likeness during the restricted period to one, or more, of Zuffa's competitors so that it can be used to promote upcoming events in other MMA leagues, the harm to Zuffa's business goodwill cannot be calculated."

It noted that Couture's contract specifically stated injunctive relief may be granted if he were to violate the non-compete clause without Zuffa having to prove damages.

Couture had regularly cornered fights from his gym on other shows while working for UFC as an employee, and even fought once in a submission match while a UFC employee but during the year he didn't have a fighter contract. Although Couture, on "Inside MMA," stated that UFC was trying to prevent him from cornering fighters, other sources say UFC doesn't have a problem with him cornering fighters, but does have a problem with

him doing interviews on rival television shows while he is at the show cornering fighters, and with his name being linked with other groups.

The injunction stated that Zuffa believes this is the first of a series of planned moves designed to compete unfairly with UFC and harm the business interests of UFC, and seeks immediate relief from the court.

They claim Couture still owes the company two fights when they claim he retired. A retirement is specifically stated in his fighter contract as freezing the contract, basically meaning the 18 month time period of

the

four-fight deal, which would end in July, would be frozen. Couture has specifically stated he "resigned" from his contract, and thus believes

he

has a finite period of time before he can fight with another organization.

Pointed out in the lawsuit is that the date on the letterhead of his faxed resignation was September 18, 2007, nearly four weeks before he actually sent the fax. Couture was at the UFC show four days later

giving

no indication anything was amiss. Zuffa also claims Couture made false and disparaging remarks on his press conference which was carried live

on

HD-Net, a rival station to Spike, which owned the cable exclusive

rights

to UFC.

Shinsuke Nakamura unified the two versions of the IWGP heavyweight title,

beating Kurt Angle, in the main event of a strong New Japan show on 2/17

at Tokyo Sumo Hall before 7,000 fans.

The crowd was up from what New Japan has been doing at Sumo Hall, but not

greatly so, and it took a loaded line-up with four title matches,

several

TNA stars and the return of Hiroyoshi Tenzan to do it.

The show was said to have been on a par with the Tokyo Dome show from a wrestling standpoint, and that was a good show.

Angle, whose TNA title wasn't at stake, has been billed as IWGP champion

for the IGF after beating Brock Lesnar on 6/29 at Sumo Hall. Lesnar was champion in 2006 with New Japan before quitting the promotion over a financial dispute and never appearing to drop the title. For the public,

the idea is that the IGF, run by Simon Inoki (former New Japan President)

and Antonio Inoki (the face of the New Japan company since its 1972 start) is a rival promotion. But after winning the title and defending it

on IGF shows, Angle then showed up at New Japan's annual Tokyo Dome show

on 1/4 holding their version of the title, beating Yuji Nagata to retain,

and set up the unification match. The deal for Angle to drop it on 2/17 was set up months ago, with it originally being Hiroshi Tanahashi, who would unify the belts for New Japan, but later the New Japan office changed it to Nakamura, who beat Tanahashi at the Dome show.

It was an Angle style match, said to be good, although not as good as the

Nagata match. The last several minutes were then working spots off the ankle lock, as in most Angle match finishes. Nakamura rolled out of an

ankle lock and into an armbar in 13:55 for the submission.

By U.S. standards, Tanahashi would have been better. He has a better look, more charisma, does draw younger fans and women (nowhere near the level of John Cena, but he does get the same sounding crowd reaction) and

is a far more exciting wrestler. Nakamura lacks charisma, but is bigger,

legitimately tougher (he was a good college wrestler and has done some MMA) and New Japan has always tried to portray their champions as being legitimate tough guys dating back to Antonio Inoki and Karl Gotch being in the company's first main event, and the success of Inoki in so-called

mixed matches in the 70s. But with New Japan not drawing a younger audience that for the most part didn't grow up with those Inoki matches in the 70s as lasting memories, and did grow up with MMA, the role of pro

wrestling has to take a different turn.

Angle was one of five TNA stars brought to Sumo Hall. In a non-title match, Christopher Daniels beat IWGP jr. champ Wataru Inoue, to set up a

future title match. Tanahashi pinned A.J. Styles, in what was reported as, along with Angle vs. Nakamura, as one of the best matches on the show. Travis Tomko & Giant Bernard lost the IWGP tag team titles to Toru

Yano & Togi Makabe, in what was Tomko's last match with New Japan.

Jeremy

Borash was also brought in as an English language ring announcer.

The big story was that the night before, Tomko showed up, unadvertised, at the IGF show at the Ariake Coliseum in Tokyo. Simon Inoki during the show, said that all kinds of big names want to come to the IGF, and brought out a guy, saying he's half of both the TNA and IWGP tag team titles, and Tomko came out, holding both belts. Tomko then threw the IWGP belt on the ground.

The word was that Tomko, who has always professed how much he liked working for New Japan, had his contract expire and he signed with the new group. He dropped the tag title clean in the ring on the Sumo Hall show.

There are a lot of people who believe the two groups aren't as much rivals as is being said, and it's just the latest attempt to do the New Japan traditional interpromotional feud that they've been doing since the

70s, and this is the foundation work being laid. The fact TNA talent works for both companies may be seen as a hint, although TNA has no exclusive in Japan on providing talent and will send talent to any office

that requests it. But Styles, Senshi (before he quit TNA), Angle and now

Tomko have all worked for IGF and New Japan in recent months.

Wrestlers who have been in Japan for lengthy periods of time have always

believed there is a backdoor connection between the groups who publicly act as being rivals. At times that has been true and at times it hasn't.

However, those connections are kept secret. Sometimes jumps are done from

one group to another, and people believe the two groups have worked it out, even though the fighter or wrestler is unaware of any deals and is making his own decision on which company to go with.

I can give an example on a New Year's Eve of a huge draw who was talking

with two different groups, and at one point told one group that he didn't

want to work for the other and decided to work for his regular company.

And as noted, this person was a difference maker. When he told his regular group, they weren't at all happy, and tried to convince him otherwise, and that's when he realized that while the new group was portraying it as raiding him, that the companies themselves had already worked out the details and him making his "own" choice and screwed up a pre-existing deal.

Tomko was likely an example of this. Even though he threw down the belt the night before, there was no heat on him at all as he came to the show.

He believed New Japan wasn't going to renew his deal, and he himself wanted to either be a real shootfighter, or reinvent himself as a shootfighter as his pro wrestling gimmick. But no heat on him throwing down the belt the night before, and practically telegraphing the title

change ahead of time, seems to say something. However, publicly a few days later, New Japan acted like they were furious at Tomko for using round trip plane tickets that they paid for and him working a "rival" promotion show.

Also on the show, Jushin Liger & AKIRA from the legends group won the IWGP jr. tag titles beating Prince Devitt (British wrestler Fergal

Devitt

who is a full-timer here)& Minoru.

1. Tiger Mask & Koji Kanemoto & Takashi Iizuka & Manabu Nakanishi beat Tetsuya Naito & Taichi Ishikari & Yujiro & Ryusuke Taguchi in 9:48 in a fast-paced good match where everyone used their big spots. Naito, Ishikari and Yujiro got the hell beat out of them by the veterans. It was

that level of brutality that is somewhat common in these situations in Japan but that you'd never see in the U.S. Finish saw Nakanishi beat Ishikari using the torture rack.

2. Christopher Daniels beat IWGP jr. champion Wataru Inoue in 13:00 of a

non-title match. Said to be a good match, although Daniels had to overcome being dropped on his head when Inoue missed a spot. Daniels looked good, getting most of the offense in. Daniels used a chair shot and started working on the left knee, winning clean with a moonsault. After the match, Daniels took the title belt and gave it back to Inoue, and then asked for a title shot.

3. Riki Choshu & Masahiro Chono & Shiro Koshinaka & Super Strong Machine

beat Hiroyoshi Tenzan & Tomohiro Ishii & Gedo & Jado in 8:55. Finish saw

Choshu give Ishii a lariat and Chono pinned Ishii after a flying kekka kick. After the match, Tenzan's partners turned on him and left him laying.

4. Jushin Liger & AKIRA won the IWGP jr. tag title over Minoru & Prince Devitt in 14:55 when Liger pinned Devitt after a brainbuster off the top

rope. One of the better matches on the show. After winning, Yujiro & Tetsuya Naito came out and challenged Liger & AKIRA for a title shot.

5. Hiroshi Tanahashi pinned A.J. Styles in 18:54. This was billed as best

flier vs. best looking. Really. Finish saw Tanahashi use his high fly flow, which is a frog splash. Said to be probably the best match on the show. The crowd was super hot at about the 16:00 mark but it faded a little as they kept doing near falls.

6. Togi Makabe & Toru Yano won the IWGP tag titles from Giant Bernard & Travis Tomko in 16:30 when Makabe pinned Tomko after a Bruiser Brody-style running kneedrop. Makabe & Yano used all kinds of foreign objects.

7. Shinsuke Nakamura beat Kurt Angle to unify the IWGP titles in 13:55.

A

big spot early was Angle doing a German suplex while on the apron, so Nakamura took a sick bump and looked like he wouldn't be able to continue. They traded hard elbows and suplexes. Finish was working spots

off the ankle lock. After counters and reverses, the finish saw Nakamura win via submission when he escaped from the ankle lock and turned it into an armbar. I was told as a pure performance by Angle, it was one of his best, because he made Nakamura look like the superstar he needed to be. Crowd went nuts for the finish and continued hot for the post-match celebration.

Billed as the Internet legend, Kimbo Slice has now proven two things in an MMA career that has lasted 61 seconds of sanctioned battle. He can hit hard, and more importantly, as Bill Goldberg stated several times during the broadcast, "He can put asses in the seats." Slice vs. Tank Abbott set the all-time record gate for any event at the BankUnited Center in Miami with a sellout 6,187 fans paying \$500,000, in a match that lasted 43 seconds. Abbott was knocked down three times by punches, before another solid shot ended with him taking a Ric Flair face first drop to the canvas that ended the slaughter. But in that short time, Slice (real name Kevin Ferguson), fighting in his home town of Miami, got one of the most raucous receptions you'll ever see at an MMA show. Being a home town favorite was part of it, but he

also received a huge reaction for his Elite XC debut last year in
Corpus Christi. At this point his charisma can't be denied, and because he fits
in the same role that made Abbott one of UFC's biggest stars in its
early days, he is already one of the most talked about fighters in the sport
and if Elite XC gets the necessary type of television deal, his story
makes it so he has potential to be a huge star.

He doesn't have to always win to keep that spot, either, as long as he
fairly often delivers the spectacular knockout finish. Abbott and Mike
Tyson were humbled to the cognoscenti years before the public tired
with them. As long as the public believes the possibility of the big punch
that means lights out exists, Slice can remain popular in the right
circumstances. But history should also point out that as big as
Abbott's name was, he was never the PPV draw he is now perceived to be. In his
heyday, he would always get a big reaction. But when the original UFC
marketed a show around "The Return of Tank" in his supposed heyday, it
did poorly based on company standards. Unlike Ken Shamrock, Abbott's
return to UFC in 2003 didn't appear to make a significant buy rate
difference. Also, Abbott was also smart at his character, as in his UFC
return in 2003, where Frank Mir submitted him in less than one minute
with a toe hold, Abbott got right up, tried to avoid showing much of a
limp, and said that everyone knows this would have been different if

they

were fighting in the bar. After the promo, Abbott got a bigger positive reaction leaving than Mir.

Abbott was the perfect opponent for Slice's second match, a famous name with a big mouth who is 42 years old and has only won once since 1998, and has never gotten out of the first round. Billed as "Street

Certified," it was pushed as a battle of legendary street fighters, one from your home town and one from out of town. In the tale of the tape,

it

listed "Brawling" as both of their athletic background. Slice was made famous as youtube videos of him knocking people out who weren't

fighters

in backyard fights, combined with his look, the stereotypical

African-American muscular guy that a segment of society believes

prisons

are full of and you don't want to meet in a dark alley. In many ways,

it's the reincarnation of the role Abbott played so well in the early

UFCs, at least outside the cage or against opponents who had no real

fighting skill. People want to believe there are tough guys who are

bouncers, street muscle, bar fighters and convicts who are so big and

bad

they can walk into a UFC or boxing ring and beat up the trained sports

fighters. Abbott himself always downplayed his boxing and wrestling

training.

And while Slice is marketed as the same street fighter from the youtube

videos, he's had nearly a year of training under Bas Rutten, has at

least

easily passed the tests given him against two fighters who both seemed like they were looking for a quick payday. In his debut Bo Cantrell tapped after just a few punches. Abbott got up several times after being

put down. But even after all the talk of him showing up in great shape, he weighed in at 263 pounds, with a big belly and it was pretty clear he

was a lamb being led to slaughter. After the first time he was put down and the ref stopped it (because Slice hit him in the back of the head), only 19 seconds in, Abbott looked gassed and ready to hit the showers.

He

seemed surprised when ref Troy Waugh said the match was still on. With no

head movement, he was a sitting duck for solid punches by the 234-pound Slice.

Abbott played West Coast white biker heel, and was booed out of the place

by the Miami faithful who reacted to the match like it was the prime of Dusty Rhodes, with it being the week Terry Funk was brought back as the opponent.

Slice's debut against former world heavyweight boxing champion Ray Mercer

was listed as an exhibition by the New Jersey Athletic Control Board, which refused to sanction it as a match even though it was the main event

on the show.

And the next step looks somewhat similar, as announcers Mauro Ranallo,

Stephen Quadros and Bill Goldberg teased that Slice's next opponent

will

be the winner of the 3/8 match at Wembley Arena in London with Ken

Shamrock vs. Robert "Buzz" Berry. There is little question the

promotion

doesn't want Shamrock, who turned 44 last week, losing to that unknown.

Even though Gary Shaw this past week expressed interest in a 2009 Ken

Shamrock vs. Frank Shamrock "Blood Brothers" concept as the company's

next PPV show, there becomes a question of how much you want to water

down a PPV match by putting the guys in a situation where they may look

bad. Still, Slice vs. Shamrock would garner even more interest than

this

match did, and to the general public, a win over Shamrock would give

Slice more legitimacy, whether it should be that way or not. Shaw said

he'd like to give Slice a few more matches before putting him with the

likes of a Ricco Rodriguez or Antonio Silva, who are the best

heavyweights in the promotion.

More important than if Slice can walk in and be the local star in Miami

like Cung Le is in San Jose, is if he can draw ratings on Showtime

nationally. And, ultimately, can he fight against real competition? A

look and an image can only take you so far. Although Abbott made a

13-year-career out of it, and when you think he's finally at the end of

his road, he issued a challenge to Ken Shamrock to finish what was

UFC's

biggest grudge match of 1996. It's a match Abbott always turned down when

numerous promoters tried to put it together, in hindsight, likely knowing

it's his last chip before busting. And with this performance, his run of

six-figure paydays to talk the talk looks like it has come to a close, even though it really should have a decade ago.

The show was, well, if you like devastating knockouts, you got it. It's clearly not the UFC. With the exception of Silva, there isn't a fighter on the show that UFC would be interested in. Shaw is clearly about marketing characters and Showtime, which is the key to whether the group

lives or dies in the end, is committed enough to do 16 live events this year, plus use repeats of this and boxing matches as prime time fare on Showtime Too. The knockouts were devastating and the show was easy to watch. The atmosphere for the main event was great and the promotion got

exactly what it wanted, the guy they are building around couldn't have looked better, even if the reality is his opponent, for a main eventer, probably couldn't have been worse.

They've got the Shamrock vs. Berry match next as part of a boxing/MMA doubleheader from the U.K. that night, followed by Strikeforce from San Jose on 3/29, and while not official, they are working on getting the 4/15 show from Honolulu with Phil Baroni vs. Kala Kolohe Hose on Showtime

as well.

1. Britt Rogers (8-0) beat James Thompson (16-8) in 2:24. You could see the difference between fighting in the U.S. and Japan in Thompson's physique. The U.K. "Colossus," was 265 pounds, and looked like a WWE headliner, in Pride. Here, he was 253 pounds and looked like a guy who would get lost in developmental. Pride loved him because he was big, and he was entertaining. He rushed out, swung wildly, and either knocked someone out, or got knocked out. Here, he decided to play a different game, as he rushed out and tried to take Rogers down. That didn't work, and Rogers caught Thompson with a knee to the jaw, and then it was left, right, left, right left, and after one last one on the ground it was over.

2. Yves Edwards (33-13-1) beat Edson Berto (14-5-1) in 4:56.

Entertaining

match while it lasted. Berto was losing the stand-up and got a single leg. With Edwards having to balance on one leg, he used that leg to jump

up and catch Berto with a knee to the jaw, which put Berto down. He added

two more punches on the ground and it was waved off. This was the same finishing style knee that Urijah Faber did to Jeff Curran on 12/12.

3. Scott Smith (15-4) beat Kyle Noke (14-4-1) in :07 of the second round.

Smith was a cast member of The Ultimate Fighter comeback season, who

was

cut last year by UFC. They had been pushing Noke, an Australian,

because

he was the bodyguard of Scott Irwin, the famous late Crocodile Hunter.

First round saw Noke outbox Smith, who just didn't do much. The crowd, which was not an MMA savvy crowd and was far more a pro wrestling crowd

with little patience, booed the round a lot. Noke was in his range and

out boxed Smith, although Smith hit harder and busted Noke under the

right eye. Noke came out with punches in round two, but Smith countered

with a sick right to the left side of Noke's mouth and Noke was cold

cocked. Smith threw one last match to a defenseless Noke before the ref

could jump in. I know the adrenaline and you are supposed to fight till

the ref jumps in but the guy was out cold before that last punch came.

Noke was motionless for a while and it was almost scary, although he

got

to where he could sit up, with blood coming from his mouth. After the

match, Smith apologized to the audience for the boring first round.

4. Antonio Silva (10-1) beat Ricco Rodriguez (27-8) via split decision

after three rounds. This was one of those times where a name fighter

beats another name fighter, but I think it hurt him more than helped

him.

This was a very different Silva than I've seen in the past. It could be

that Rodriguez was a higher quality opponent, or it could be this was a

different Silva. The thing with Silva is he used to be a 300 pound

giant

proportioned man, who was lean at that weight. Unfortunately, he had

acromegaly, and while he's not all that tall (he was a few inches shorter than Bill Goldberg when Goldberg interviewed him, although Goldberg was in shoes and Silva was bare-footed), but he has a huge head, hands and feet. In some ways he's like Andre when he was young and in shape but carried so much size, but if Andre had been 6-1 (Silva is billed at 6-4 but no way). And he was coordinated, and pretty damn quick for a 300-pounder. Even though he lost once, he appeared to be the best 300-pounder in the game. But after not being allowed to fight in California, he got the tumor causing the over secretion of natural Growth

Hormone taken out. Now he's 259.75 pounds and that explosiveness and strength didn't seem there. Of course, he had also torn his MCL two weeks

before the fight, so that wasn't going to help, and maybe this match isn't a fair appraisal of where Silva stands. UFC was interested in Silva

as a heavyweight last year, but when EXC made a six-figure per fight offer, UFC wouldn't match it. Shaw was trying all week to push the idea Silva was the best heavyweight in the world, but he sure didn't look it.

Rodriguez, who currently is on VH-1's Celebrity Rehab, has real grappling

and wrestling talent, and was probably Silva's toughest opponent to date.

Goldberg made a comment that Rodriguez may be a good fighter but as a

person it's questionable. That was in regard to not only his drug problem, but that when he was in a serious auto accident, allegedly he put his unconscious girlfriend in the drivers' seat before the police came. Rodriguez was 262.75 pounds, with a sloppy belly, but he was in a lot better shape than he'd been when he was fighting well North of 300 in recent years. Silva was winning the stand-up in round one, but Rodriguez took him down later in the round and ground and pounded him until the end of the round. I had Rodriguez winning the first round. Second round was all Silva. He was connecting on punches standing. Rodriguez was trying to get it down and not having any luck. He tried a single and Silva stepped out and started punching Rodriguez on the ground, busing his left eye. Rodriguez told the ref he couldn't see and then winked at someone. This gave him a reprieve, as he asked to continue and after cleaning up the cut, it didn't look so bad. They restarted it standing, which made no sense since Rodriguez was on his back. At the start of the third round, Silva exploded with a takedown, probably cognizant it was a close fight. He did ground and pound. The ref stood them up. With 1:30 left, Rodriguez got a takedown and used ground and pound until the end of the round. He didn't have enough time or did enough damage while on top to take the

round in my book, but if the round was another minute long he could have won the fight. Scores were 28-29, 30-27 and 29-28 (I had 29-28), split for Silva.

5. Kimbo Slice (2-0) beat Tank Abbott (9-14) in :43. The crowd came specifically for this fight, and even though it was short, everyone left celebrating because they got to see their guy knock out Abbott decisively. Had the ref not warned Slice about the punch to the back of the head and called for a stand-up at :19, Abbott was a few seconds from being finished the first time he went down. Abbott got a rest, and then a fan threw something in the ring and Slice threw it out. Abbott kept getting knocked down, and could have stayed down, but struggled to get up, and tried in vain for a takedown, until the final punch landed, resulting in his face first fall to the mat, which was clearly the end.

Just days before his 65th birthday, Antonio Inoki, the single most enduring pro wrestling legend in the world, with son-in-law Simon, ran the Inoki Genome Federation's latest show on 2/16 at the Ariake Coliseum in Tokyo.

The show featured the unannounced surprise of Travis Tomko from New Japan and TNA. As is the typical insane Inoki pattern, the line-up for the

card

was never announced in advance. And like always, because of it, the advance ticket sales were poor. The biggest push was that Stan Hansen

and

Dory Funk were coming to the show. Actually, they were joined by Bob Orton, Kengo Kimura, Yoshiaki Fujiwara, George Takano, Ichimasa

Wakamatsu

and Shiro Kameda (the 42-year-old father of the boxing Kameda brothers).

Orton & Kimura actually first showed up in pirate costumes and under masks as the Gasper Brothers (a New Japan gimmick in the 80s, actually consisting of Orton & Daryl Karolet-Karolet is now actor Tyler Maine,

who

played Michael Myers in the last Halloween movie).

As it turned out, neither Inoki nor Hansen refereed the Naoya Ogawa vs. Josh Barnett main event as was teased before the show. After Ogawa won, an angle was set up for Ogawa vs. Kiyoshi Tamura as the main event on the

4/12 show in Osaka. However, after the show, the latest media teases

for

that card are a three-way round-robin singles program with Ogawa vs.

Tamura vs. Barnett as pushed by Ogawa, or Ogawa vs. Tomko, as pushed by Antonio Inoki.

The show drew 4,000 fans, which isn't good by any means, but considering

WWE just came in and only did 6,500 in the same building last week, it

can't be described as too bad for a show that had no advance. The draw was more what celebrities would show up and what other ones would send video messages to Inoki for his birthday. In the days before the show, they hyped that Vince McMahon and Dusty Rhodes would both be sending him

birthday messages during the show, which turned out to be the case.

Those who aired on the big screen to wish Inoki a Happy Birthday, including Tiger Jeet Singh and Johnny Powers (two of his most famous rivals from the 70s in the days of the NWF championship), Wallid Ismail (an MMA fighter who has co-promoted shows with him), Animal Hamaguchi (former New Japan wrestler who is now the coach of Japan's women's amateur wrestling national team), Jeff Jarrett, Rhodes, Jerry Lawler and

Vince McMahon.

Inoki continued to push the dated concept of using people who have done shoots, whether poorly or not, as pro wrestlers and have them work a more

shoot oriented style, with the idea of trying to portray his pro wrestling as real. It was a concept that worked during Inoki's heyday, and when done in moderation worked until the MMA boom, but in recent years it's always failed on a huge scale.

1. Kazuhiro Hamanaka beat Kazuki Okubo with a half crab in 5:23.

Hamanaka

has done mainly MMA (including IFL with the Tokyo Sabres), but some pro wrestling. Okubo fought most of his career with Pancrase.

2. Michiyoshi Ohara defeated Atsushi Sawada in 4:48. Ohara dominated

the

match using head-butts. After a series of head butts, followed by a

power

bomb, the ref stopped the match and ruled Sawada wasn't intelligently trying to defend himself.

3. Erik Paulsen beat Taka Kunou in 7:23 with an armbar. Paulsen was one of the pioneer shootfighters in Japan dating back to pre-UFC days and the

smaller promotions. Kunou was a judo player years back. Neither of these

guys had done any pro wrestling until recent months.

4. Danny Iguazu, billed as 7-2 ½ and 330 pounds, a Brazilian giant who debuted on the last show (Inoki has a thing for giants because of his feud with Andre), defeated Tadao Yasuda in just 1:20. Yasuda got the first takedown, but Iguazu knocked him loopy with a knee to the head. Yasuda sold like he was knocked out, and maybe he was.

5. In the big surprise of the show, both Antonio and Simon Inoki came out

and announced that stars from everywhere and trying to get into the IGF.

He said he was half of the TNA and IWGP tag team titles. Tomko beat Alexander Otsuka in 3:34. Tomko used a power bomb and then got the submission with an armbar. Tomko came out and worked an MMA style match.

As part of reinventing himself as an MMA fighter, he came out and took off his wrestling boots with the symbolism that he was retiring as a

"pro

wrestler,"and went in barefooted like he was a fighter.

6. Booker T pinned Tajiri in 12:21. Tajiri blew green mist in the corner.

Simon Inoki came out and yelled at Tajiri for blowing the mist. Good match ending with Booker using a power bomb and a bicycle kick for the pin. Booker, who hadn't been allowed in Japan in many years due to a felony for armed robbery around 20 years ago. Tajiri dropkicked Simon Inoki after the match but shook hands with Booker.

7. Hitokui Yoshiki (a new name for Yoshiki Takahashi) beat Montanha Silva

(another Brazilian giant) in 3:21. Silva, who is about 7-0 and 315 pounds, was a pro wrestler in Brazil who the BJJ guys found and tried to

train him to be a kickboxer or MMA fighter. So he can do pro wrestling, but has no charisma doing so. Silva went for a power bomb, but Yoshiki caught him in a guillotine for the submission.

8. Naoya Ogawa and Josh Barnett split two matches. They did the worked shoot style, trading submission attempts. After a suplex, Barnett got

an

armbar and the referee stopped the match in 4:48. However, Ogawa had his

foot on the ropes and never tapped. Ogawa started protesting the call and

yelling at Antonio Inoki. Inoki, at ringside, said he never saw Ogawa's

foot on the ropes because he was talking with guests at ringside. Ogawa

complained and said that he wanted a rematch right there and then. Barnett agreed to it. The second match saw them brawl outside the ring. Barnett rammed Ogawa's head into the ringpost. Barnett used a German suplex and a high kick to the head. Barnett used a backdrop suplex and went for a guillotine, but Ogawa reversed it into an STO and got the pin in 5:13. The show ended with a family ceremony with all the fighters, as well as the legends who came out. Kiyoshi Tamura gave flowers to Inoki and then Ogawa went after him and challenged him to a match.

The final episode of this season's run of American Gladiators, moved from

Monday to Sunday on 2/17, drew only a 3.2 rating.

Smackdown on 2/15 did a 2.8 rating on the east nationals and a first estimate of 4.45 million viewers.

TNA Impact on 2/14 did a 1.08 rating and 1.5 million viewers. The show did a 0.68 in Males 18-34 and 0.88 in Males 35-49.

For whatever reason, the show didn't get the usual big quarter given by the CSI lead-in. But even with a wedding, and wedding's have historically

done big numbers in wrestling, they didn't keep the viewership until the end.

The Devon vs. Shark Boy & Curry Man match lost 14,000 viewers. Steiner

vs. Petey Williams and Tomko joining the Angle alliance lost 14,000 viewers. Styles & Tomko vs. Joe & Nash lost 139,000 viewers. Make sense out of that. Rellik vs. Young and the NASCAR guys show with the Homicide vs. Rave vs. Sabin three-way gained 41,000 viewers. The Rhino promo and ODB vs. Awesome Kong lost about 139,000 viewers, so the women as a novelty are no longer knocking them dead in the quarters. This was actually the lowest rated segment of the show clocking in at only 0.91. The wedding gained 167,000 viewers but was still only the fourth highest rated segment on the show.

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Miss

Elizabeth, Freddie Blassie, Road Warrior Hawk, Andre the Giant, Curt Hennig, Johnny Valentine, Davey Boy Smith, Terry Gordy, Owen Hart, Stu Hart, Gorilla Monsoon, The Sheik and Tim Woods. The book is available for

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RESULTS

2/12 Mexico City Arena Mexico (CMLL TV tapings - 2,500): Trueno &

Sombra

de Plata b Ciber Black & Angel Perverso, Sahori & Luna Magica & Goddess

b

Amapola & Seductora & Rosa Negra, Mictlan & Stuka Jr. & Fabian el

Gitano

b El Satanico & Euforia & Nosferatu-DQ, Felino & Valiente & La Mascara

b

Virus & Ephesto & Misterioso II, Shocker & Dos Caras Jr. & Blue Panther
b

Mr. Aguila & El Terrible & Damian 666

2/13 Honolulu (WWE Raw - 6,000): Ric Flair b Mr. Kennedy, Charlie Haas
b

D.H. Smith, Tag titles: Bob Holly & Cody Rhodes b Lance Cade & Trevor
Murdoch, Snitsky b Brian Kendrick, WWE title: Randy Orton b Chris
Jericho, Women's title: Beth Phoenix b Mickie James, IC title: Jeff
Hardy

b Carlito, Shawn Michaels & HHH b Umaga & William Regal

2/13 Santiago, Chile (WWE Smackdown - 12,500 sellout): Big Daddy V b
Jamie Noble, U.S. title: MVP b Fit Finlay, Kelly Kelly & Michelle
McCool

b Victoria & Layla, Rey Mysterio & Kane b Zack Ryder & Curt Hawkins,
Chavo Guerrero won three-way to keep ECW title over Shelton Benjamin
and

C.M. Punk, Batista b Mark Henry, World title: Edge b Undertaker-DQ

2/14 Santiago, Chile (WWE Smackdown - 12,500 sellout): Kofi Kingston b
Shelton Benjamin, Kelly Kelly & Michelle McCool b Layla & Victoria,
U.S.

title: MVP b Kane-DQ, Fit Finlay & Jamie Noble b Zach Ryder & Curt
Hawkins, ECW title: Chavo Guerrero b C.M. Punk, Undertaker b Mark
Henry,

World title: Edge b Batista

2/15 Fresno (WWE Raw - 8,000): Super Crazy won three-way over Brian
Kendrick and Carlito, Val Venis b Charlie Haas, Tag titles: Bob Holly &

Cody Rhodes b Lance Cade & Trevor Murdoch, Snitsky b D.H. Smith, Ric Flair b Mr. Kennedy, Women's title: Beth Phoenix b Mickie James, WWE title: Randy Orton b Jeff Hardy, Cage match: HHH b Umaga

2/15 Mexico City Arena Mexico (CMLL TV tapings - 11,400): Astro Boy & Metalico b Polvora & Vaquero, Bam Bam & Pequeno Olimpico & Ultimo Dragoncito b Pierrothito & Pequeno Violencia & Mini Black Warrior, Heavy

Metal & Sagrado & Maximo b Virus & Shigeo Okumura & Misterioso II, Blue Panther & Grey Shadow & Marco Corleone b Hector Garza & El Terrible & Damian 666, Mistico & La Sombra & Volador Jr. b Perro Aguayo Jr. & Averno

& Mephisto-DQ

2/15 Queretearo (AAA TV tapings - 10,000 sellout): Fabi Apache & Estrellita & Sexy Star b Mari Apache & Ayako Hamada & La Diabolica, Dark

Ozz & Dark Cuervo & Dark Escoria b Gato Eveready & Rey Cometa & Aero Star, Psycho Clown & Zombie Clown & Killer Clown b Mascara Divina & Pimpinela Escarlata & Alebrije, Bull terrier match: Mr. Niebla b Abismo Negro-DQ, Zorro & Electro Shock & Kenzo Suzuki b Brazo de Plata &

Intocable & Gronda, Scorpio Jr. & Decnis won four-way over Chessman & Charly Manson, Halloween & Extreme Tiger and Octagon & Laredo Kid

2/15 Tokyo Korakuen Hall (Pro Wrestling NOAH - 2,100 sellout): Mohammed Yone & Taiji Ishimori b Junji Izumida & Yoshinobu Kanemaru, Akira Taue &

Tamon Honda & Tsuyoshi Kikuchi b Akitoshi Saito & Masao Inoue & Akihiko Ito, GHC hardcore title: Kishin Kawabata b Mitsuo Momota, Naomichi

Marufuji & Takashi Sugiura & Go Shiozaki b Yoshihiro Takayama & Takuma Sano & Ippei Ota, KENTA b Atsushi Aoki, Takeshi Morishima b Shuhei Taniguchi, Jun Akiyama & Kentaro Shiga b Chris Hero & Claudio Castagnoli,
Doug Williams & Mark & Jay Briscoe b Mitsuharu Misawa & Yoshinari Ogawa &
Kotaro Suzuki

2/16 Los Angeles Staples Center (WWE Raw - 13,000): Ric Flair b Mr. Kennedy, Val Venis ref for women's title: Beth Phoenix b Mickie James, Super Crazy & Brian Kendrick & D.H. Smith b Carlito & Charlie Haas & Snitsky, WWE title: Randy Orton b Jeff Hardy, Tag titles: Bob Holly & Cody Rhodes b Lance Cade & Trevor Murdoch, Street fight: Chris Jericho b

JBL, HHH & Shawn Michaels b Umaga & William Regal

2/16 Miami (Elite XC - 6,187 sellout): Moyses Gabni b Jirka Hlavaty, Lorenzo Borgameo b Mike Bernhard, Eric Bradley b Mikey Gomez, Dave Herman

b Mario Rinaldi, Yosmany Cabezas b Jon Kirk, Rafael Feijao b John Doyle,

Britt Rogers b James Thompson, Yves Edwards b Edson Berto, Scott Smith b

Kyle Noke, Antonio Silva b Ricco Rodriguez, Kimbo Slice b Tank Abbott

2/17 Tokyo Korakuen Hall (All Japan - 2,100 sellout): Katsushi Takemura b

Manabu Soya, Nosawa & Mazada b C.J. Otis & Hajime Suruga, Kai & Hiroshi Yamato b T-28 & Seiya Sanada, Kaz Hayashi NC Shuji Kondo, Dory Funk &

Masa Fuchi & Osamu Nishimura b Nobutaka Araya & Nobukazu Hirai & Ryuji Hijikata, Keiji Muto & Suwama & Joe Doering b Taru & Zodiac & Naoki Tanizaki, Satoshi Kojima & Silver King b Kensuke Sasaki & Katsuhiko Nakajima

2/17 Nagoya (Pro Wrestling NOAH - 1,200 sellout): Tsuyoshi Kikuchi & Masashi Aoyagi b Ippei Ota & Mitsuo Momota, Kishin Kawabata & Kentaro Shiga b Genba Hirayanagi & Junji Izumida, Shuhei Taniguchi & Takeshi Morishima & Yoshinobu Kanemaru b Akihiko Ito & Takuma Sano & Kotaro Suzuki, KENTA & Taiji Ishimori & Mohammed Yone b Mark & Jay Briscoe & Claudio Castagnoli, Mitsuharu Misawa & Yoshinari Ogawa b Doug Williams &

Chris Hero, Takashi Sugiura & Naomichi Marufuji b Jun Akiyama & Atsushi Aoki, Kenta Kobashi & Tamon Honda & Go Shiozaki b Akira Taue & Akitoshi Saito & Masao Inoue

2/17 Mexico City Arena Coliseo (CMLL TV tapings): Sensei & Trueno b Messala & Zayco, Hooligan & Nitro & Ramstein b Angel Azteca Jr. & Flash &

Metalico, Dark Angel & Luna Magica & Sahori b Amapola & Raven Hiroka & Mima Shimoda, Ephesto & Olimpico & El Satanico b Felino & Mascara Purpura

& Valiente, Leono & Marco Corleone & Negro Casas b Atlantis & Sangre Azteca & Ultimo Guerrero-DQ

2/18 Anaheim (WWE Raw/Heat TV tapings): Jim Duggan b Rory McAllister, Bob

Holly b Charlie Haas, Mickie James b Melina, Lance Cade b Brian Kendrick,

Carlito b Cody Rhodes, Money in bank qualifier: Jeff Hardy b Snitsky,
Paul Burchill b Super Crazy, Money in bank qualifier: Mr. Kennedy b Val
Venis, Non-title: Maria b Beth Phoenix, Non-title/HHH ref: John Cena b
Randy Orton

2/18 Shimonoseki (All Japan - 1,500): Kai & Hiroshi Yamato b Hajime
Suruga & Ryuji Hijikata, Nobutaka Araya & Ryan Mitchell b Nobukazu
Hirai

& Manabu Soya, Katsuhiko Nakajima & T-28 b Silver King & C.J. Otis,
Dory

Funk & Osamu Nishimura & Joe Doering b Nosawa & Mazada & Katsushi
Takemura, Satoshi Kojima & Zodiac b Kensuke Sasaki & Seiya Sanada,
Keiji

Muto & Suwama & Kaz Hayashi b Taru & Shuji Kondo & Naoki Tanizaki

2/19 San Diego (WWE Smackdown/ECW tapings - 8,000 sellout): Michelle
McCool b Victoria, Kofi Kingston b Jason Riggs, The Miz b Colin
Delaney,

Stevie Richards b James Curtis, Ric Flair & C.M. Punk b Elijah Burke &
Shelton Benjamin, Money in the Bank qualifier: Shelton Benjamin b Jimmy
Wang Yang, Jesse & Festus b Deuce & Domino, Big Daddy V b Shannon
Moore,

Non-title: Batista b MVP, Kane b Great Khali, Chuck Palumbo b Matt
Jackson, Non-title: Rey Mysterio b Chavo Guerrero, Undertaker & Kane &
Batista b Edge & Zack Ryder & Curt Hawkins

Special thanks to: Phil Adams, Zach Alexander, Steven Ashe, Bryan
Alvarez, Pat Bailey, Guy Bogard, Daniel Chornomaz, Paul Clay, Harvey
Cobb, Alan Counihan, Steven Crouch, Chris Cruise, Devin Cutting, Jimmie

Daniel, Ty Dawson, Mike DeGeorge, Burt Duckwall, Bob Evans, Andrew Fine,
Mike Giralico, Manuel Gonzalez, Larry Goodman, Ian Hamilton, Joe Hamilton
Jr., David Herrera, Chris Hickey, Harmony Jackson, Patrick Jones,
Alexander Josephs, Paul Kacprzak, Rich Koz, Sebastian Klussman, Mike Kuzmuk, Mike Lano, Jim Lemond, Keith Lipinski, Stephen Lyon, George Maranville, Alex Marvez, Tim Noel, Steve Ogilvie, Mike Omansky, Gene Restaino, David Romero, Philip Schuler, Jason Seay, Steve "Dr. Lucha" Sims, Jason Squires, Rich Tate, Tommy Troutman, Dominick Valenti, Scott Walton, Grigg Zachary, Kris Zellner

CMLL: A press conference for regular TV news took place with all the members of Los Perros Del Mal except Hector Garza live. Garza was "via satellite" talking. Garza said he wanted to remain part of the team and hoped they could work together and get along. Averno & Mephisto were there grumbling about it while Perro Aguayo Jr. didn't say anything. In

a newspaper article in Reforma, Garza said Aguayo Jr. had apologized to him

and blame dit on Averno & Mephisto, saying them joining will be the downfall of Los Perros Del Mal and he hinted he would be feuding with Aguayo Jr. . . The 2/15 show at Arena Mexico drew 11,400 fans with a main

event of Mistico & La Sombra & Volador Jr. vs. Aguayo Jr. & Averno & Mephisto. Averno & Mephisto said they want to now be called Los Perros Infernales, since they were originally Infernales. The faces won in two

straight falls when the heels paid no attention to decorum, as Aguayo Jr.

in particular unmasked Mistico and tore up his ring outfit, and then shoved down ref Babe Richard. Aguayo Jr. debuted his new catch phrase, "Dios perdona, los Perros No," which essentially means, "God Forgives, Los Perros don't." That'll be the new hot selling T-shirt in Mexico.

Aguayo Jr. after the match also sent a message to Garza saying that he is

no longer with the group and they were going to retire him. Fans were super hot for the main event with a split crowd, as lots of fans with their black Los Perros Del Mal T-shirts. Semifinal had Marco Corleone & Blue Panther (subbing for no-show Alex Koslov) & Grey Shadow over Garza &

El Terrible & Damian 666 in two straight falls. Garza wouldn't wear a Los

Perros Del Mal T-shirt, but his teammates did. They lost the first fall.

In the second fall, Garza's partners just walked out on him, leaving him

alone to get pinned. After the face team won and left the ring, Aguayo Jr. ran down and all of Los Perros once again pounded on Garza. Mistico &

Sombra & Volador Jr. made the save so they had a hot open to the main event. The Garza aspect of the angle seems to be working big because Mistico got cheered a good 60% against Aguayo when he made the save for Garza, and usually it would be the other way around. Garza bled heavy

and

had to be carried to the back by the faces. During the undercard, they did a ceremony for Heavy Metal, who has now been wrestling for 20 years (actually his debut was October 2008, so it's a few months early, although he did work shows before his official debut on cards his father

promoted as a teenager). . . After the show, Mistico flew to Las Vegas to

be in the corner of Critian Mijares, who was on the undercard of the Pavlik-Taylor card. . . Tarzan Boy is back under suspension. . . The

2/22

Arena Mexico show has Shocker & Sombra & Garza vs. Aguayo Jr. & Averno &

Mephisto plus Dr. Wagner Jr. & Panther & Valiente vs. Atlantis & Ultimo Guerrero & Rey Bucanero. Will be interesting to see how they draw with no

Mistico, but with the first in-ring of Aguayo vs. Garza in many years.

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. They ran Arena Mexico on a Tuesday on 2/12 instead of Coliseo because of the construction in the area and only drew 2,500 fans with Shocker & Dos Caras Jr. & Blue Panther beating Mr. Aguila & El Terrible & Damian 666. . . Nicho, now 36, did an interview saying he was trying to get back

into CMLL. He said he's working through L.A. Park to get back in, saying

he wants to be back in the spotlight. He said he left AAA because they

weren't paying him enough to do the kind of matches they wanted him to do, and he had no input on where things were going.

AAA: La Parka and Cibernetico both had their first matches back on 2/13 in Puebla. Parka is back from shoulder surgery and Cibernetico when he suffered bad burns when flames engulfed a table Mesias power bombed him at the last major card of 2007. The show, headlined by Electroshock & Kenzo Suzuki & Zorro over Cibernetico & Parka & Elegido drew a sellout 3,500 fans for a non-TV taping. . . Surprisingly, neither wrestled at the

2/15 TV tapings in Queretearo, which drew a sellout of 10,000 fans. It was headlined by a four-way elimination match where Decnis & Scorpio Jr.

won over Octagon & Laredo Kid, Halloween & Extreme Tiger and Chessman & Charly Manson to earn a spot in the Rey de Reyes match. Decnis & Scorpio

Jr. were left when, after Octagon & Laredo were eliminated first, Halloween & Extreme Tiger and Chessman & Manson just went at it with each

other with no regard to the match and were disqualified. The second from

the top match saw The Foreign Legion of Zorro & Electro Shock & Kenzo Suzuki beat Intocable & Gronda & Super Porky. The Foreign Legion team were two-thirds Mexican this week.. The other big match was Mr. Niebla vs. Abismo Negro in a bull terrier (dog collar chain match) match with the winner becoming the official leader of Los Vipers. Abismo knocked out

Niebla with a chair shot and dragged Niebla to all six corners to win the match and was announced the winner. However, Joaquin Roldan came out and overturned the decision because of the chair shot, saying Abismo Negro isn't fit to be the leader of a group. Konnan then came out and threatened to beat up Roldan for reneging on all his demands, but before he could attack him, the lights went out, and when they came back on, Cibernetico was in the ring. On the undercard, the Psycho Clowns have upped their winning streak to 40 matches. . . So far announced for the 3/16 Rey de Reyes show at Plaza de Toros Monumental in Monterrey (15,000 capacity) besides Rey de Reyes, where they are doing qualifying matches each week on television, in a six-way ladder match with Chessman vs. Joe Lider vs. Juventud Guerrera vs. Extreme Tiger vs. Halloween vs. Teddy Hart, Charly Manson & Laredo Kid & Octagon & a surprise wrestler vs. Ron Killings & Scott Steiner & two surprise wrestlers and the return of Mesias, defending the AAA heavyweight title against Cibernetico. Although this is a grudge match since Mesias is the one who power bombed Cibernetico through the flaming table, Mesias himself has been gone since doing an angle where the Foreign Legion turned on him and "injured"

him.

. . They are hoping Jack Evans will be okay after his facial surgery and

be one of the surprise wrestlers. . .TripleMania for this year is currently set for 6/13 at Palacio de los Deportes in Mexico City. Among the people being talked with for the show is Bobby Lashley. . .

Killings

will be working here full-time until WWE tells him to start, which will probably be after Wrestlemania because there is no point in starting him

before. . . With X-Pac still in rehab in Houston (no time frame for how much longer he'll be in), Alicia Webb has been going on the road and doing her bookings. . . According to Hector Melendez, who started here this week doing the television production, Jeff Jeffrey, a Puerto Rican wrestler Melendez was tight with and managed, will start full-time here on 3/1.

ZERO-ONE MAX: They are working with New Japan more, as a 3/2 show at Korakuen Hall features a New Japan vs. Z-1 theme with Manabu Nakanishi vs. Takao Omori, Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Kohei Sato and Koji Kanemoto & Ryusuke Taguchi vs. Ikuto Hidaka & Masato Tanaka. . . Sandy Beach won the

United National title from Yoshito Sasaki on 2/11 at Korakuen Hall.

ALL JAPAN: The new tour, built around the farewell of Dory Funk, opened on 2/17 at a sold out Korakuen Hall. They opened with a main event designed to build the 3/1 main events, as Triple Crown champ Kensuke Sasaki teamed with Katsuhiko Nakajima against Satoshi Kojima & Silver

King. The 3/1 show has Sasaki vs. Kojima for the Triple Crown title and Nakajima vs. Silver King for the jr. title. So they had Kojima pin Nakajima with a lariat at the finish and Kojima destroyed all four of Sasaki's proteges with chair shots after the match to build heat for the

Sumo Hall main. Funk & Osamu Nishimura & Masa Fuchi beat Ryuji Hijikata &

Nobukazu Hirai & Nobutaka Araya with Funk using the spinning toe hold as

the finish. Crowd treated Funk like a legend, going nuts for him and always wanting him to tag in. Every time anyone got any offense on Funk,

they'd be booed. Yasshi was injured in a 2/16 singles match with Riki Choshu on a small indie card and won't be back for four weeks. Naoki Tanizaki is taking his place the entire tour, and teamed with Taru & Zodiac (Aaron "Jesus" Aguilera) to lose to Keiji Muto & Suwama & Joe Doering. El Samurai, who was recently dropped by New Japan Pro Wrestling

in a cost cutting measure, signed here. It was set up during a Kaz Hayashi vs. Shuji Kondo match, where Hayashi said before the match that they were going to have the best match on the show. They were having a great match when Nosawa & Mazada hit the ring and interfered, causing it

to be a no contest. As they were doing the beatdown, Samurai ran in for the save. Samurai & Hayashi shook hands, so it looks like they'll become

a tag team. Also debuting were Kai & Hiroshi Yamato. Both guys were trained here, but sent to the IWRG promotion in Naucalpan, Mexico, and worked there for a year getting experience before starting out. They looked good. . . They will be holding a junior heavyweight tag league based on their traditional December tag team tournament. It runs 3/12 at

Korakuen Hall and finishes on 3/23 in Niigata. Teams are Hayashi & Samurai, Ryuji Hijikata & Nakajima, Yamato & Kai, Yujiro Kushida & T-28,

Shuji Kondo & Brother Yasshi and Mazada & Nosawa.

PRO WRESTLING NOAH: The new tour opened on 2/15 at Korakuen Hall with a sellout 2,100 with Doug Williams & Mark & Jay Briscoe beating Mitsuharu Misawa & Yoshinari Ogawa & Kotaro Suzuki in the main event. Also from ROH, Chris Hero & Claudio Castagnoli lost to Jun Akiyama & Kentaro Shiga

when Shiga pinned Hero. They also did singles matches with Atsushi Aoki and Shuhei Taniguchi in the series where each faces the biggest stars.

Aoki was pinned by KENTA in 18:14 with the Go 2 sleep, while Taniguchi, who are they looking at as a future headliner, was pinned by Takeshi Morishima in 5:06 with the backdrop driver. Mitsuo Momota's last title shot, a hardcore title match against Kishin Kawabata, saw Kawabata win using an inside cradle in 9:28. By the rules of this match, had Momota, now 58, lasted 10:00, he would have gotten the title. . . Kenta Kobashi didn't work the first night of the tour, but he did headline on 2/17 in Nagoya, before a sellout at the 1,200-seat Zepp Nagoya, teaming with protege Go Shiozaki & training partner Tamon Honda to beat Akira Taue &

Masao Inoue & Akitoshi Saito. Kobashi does almost nothing but chop now, and in this match, ended up throwing 147 chops.

NEW JAPAN: The next tour will be 3/9 to 3/23, opening in Nagoya and ending in Amagasaki, which will be the 16-man single elimination New Japan Cup tournament. The tournament is to determine the top contender for Shinsuke Nakamura's IWGP title. The tournament winner vs. Nakamura takes place on 3/30 at Korakuen Hall. At this point, Yuji Nagata is still

being pushed as being in the tournament, which also includes Rhino, as well as the return of Milano Collection A.T., who has been out for three

months with an injury. The first round matches are: 3/9 in Nagoya has Hirooki Goto vs. Hiroshi Tanahashi, Tomohiro Ishii vs. Hiroyoshi Tenzan and Koji Kanemoto vs. Nagata; 3/13 in Iwaide has Takashi Iizuka vs.

Togi

Makabe; 3/14 in Hiroshima has Jushin Liger vs. Ryusuke Taguchi; 3/15 in Toyooka has Milano Collection A.T. vs. Toru Yano; 3/16 in Kurashiki has Giant Bernard vs. Tomoaki Honma; and 3/17 in Yonago has Rhino vs.

Manabu

Nakanishi. Quarter finals are 3/19 in Hamamatsu and 3/21 in Chiba, with the semifinals and finals on 3/23. . . With Tomko gone, they are pushing

Giant Bernard & Nakamura as a tag team, and they face new IWGP tag champs

Togi Makabe & Toru Yano for the belts on the 3/9 show. The 3/9 show is also the 35th anniversary of Kyodo Kikaku promoting Nagoya, which has

always been New Japan's best city outside of Tokyo, promoting live events. They've added a 35th anniversary special match by bringing Tatsumi Fujinami & Riki Choshu & Masahiro Chono in as a legends trio against Gedo & Jado & Honma.

HERE AND THERE: American Gladiators is doing more casting looking for new

Gladiators. Apparently they aren't happy with the personalities of some of the male Gladiators and want more "over the top" personalities like a

Hulk Hogan/Ultimate Warrior pro wrestler. Some of the late cuts from the

original cast have been called back and told to come in with an outlandish personality, so they want the guys to come up with their own gimmicks. They are also considering at least one pro wrestler. . .

Pinellas-Pasco Circuit Judge Chris Helinger ordered a pre-sentence investigation of Nick Bollea prior to deciding on a sentence. It's part of the process if Bollea and his attorney do a plea bargain. Bollea can receive anything from probation to five years in prison on charges of reckless driving involving serious bodily injury. In his favor is no prior criminal record, but in this case his speeding tickets may work against him because it shows a pattern of reckless driving. . . Dwayne Johnson will be presenting an award at the Oscars this year. Johnson said

that, "After year of acting, it's the biggest honor thus far." "Game Plan" is now in its third week of being the best selling DVD of any kind

in the U.S., having done \$26.08 million in the first three weeks. He also signed to do voice over work in an animated movie called "Planet 51," written by Joe Stillman, who did Shrek and Shrek 2. Jessica Biel, Justin Long and Sean William Scott will also be doing voice work. . . Bobby Heenan is showing very slow improvement. He still can't talk, but he now has a chalkboard and can write on it. . . Season five of "Hogan Knows Best" will be actually just the Brooke Hogan show, living on her own in a penthouse in Miami Beach. Without Hulk on the show, the ratings will nosedive.

ROH: Gabe Sapolsky sent out a memo to all the wrestlers focusing on improving the quality of the house shows. He said he felt the shows were too long now, and thinks they are leaving the audiences tired after shows and not wanting more. He told everyone to listen to time cues and not run over. He told talent to push him regarding angles, if they think an angle is being followed up on strongly enough or being forgotten and to ask for promo time. He also wanted to tighten up on the time for the ring introductions and post-match. He also wants to cut back on the time

between matches, noting that in NOAH, they already having the music playing for the next match in 10-20 seconds after the prior match participants have gone through the curtain. He also wants no more swearing from the wrestlers and has threatened fining people who swear on

stage, and when guys leave after a match, to look at the camera and give

a line regarding your key future opponent on a major show.

TNA: Jonny Fairplay didn't sign a contract when he came in. They are still talking with him, reportedly about a two-year deal. As noted,

Dixie

Carter always liked him and was a proponent of him, and as you could tell

by how little he was used on television the last time he was under contract, the people in creative weren't proponents of him after they brought him in and gave him this monster push like he was a big celebrity

upon first signing in Nashville. Basically on him, there are two sides, those who want him in and those who don't, and the decision will be made

based on which side does the best job of influencing Carter. There is interest in a member of the current season's cast of "Survivor,"

apparently a big guy named Joel who is a fireman, with a good look.

Fairplay was pushing him and they are interested if the guy gets over during the season. The way it was explained, they talked about having

Jon

Hugger (Rellik) train him at first and eventually Kurt Angle train as they want to fast-track him to television feeling they can capitalize on

his following from the show. He came to the tapings with Fairplay, but was never introduced to the crowd. The problem here is that, and there are always exceptions but the rule of thumb is, there is little enduring

fame from appearing on a reality show as opposed to being a genuine star.

Fairplay, who did game fame from the first season of "Survivor," largely

because he played heel and became he made up that his grandmother died, then came to TNA and they made a big deal about it, but the fans didn't treat him like he was a star. Later, instead of using him as talent, he got paid very good (more than \$100,000 per year) to come to Orlando and basically he worked with Jimmy Hart going around Universal to recruit people at the park to come to the tapings. From what we heard, tons more

people knew Hart, and really, the only people who recognized Fairplay for

the most part were older women, and that's hardly the target audience TNA

hits. The argument is the Fairplay experiment was already done, it failed, and Fairplay didn't even get a good run on Survivor this season where at least you could argue he's back in the public eye. Plus, Fairplay is not well liked, for burying the company in media

appearances

after he left and making fun of how much they paid him for so little work. . . The 3/9 PPV from Norfolk will be headlined by Samoa Joe & Christian Cage & Kevin Nash vs. Kurt Angle & Tomko & A.J. Styles, plus Awesome Kong vs. ODB vs. Gail Kim for the Knockouts title, James Storm vs. Rhino in an Elevation X (scaffold) match, Jay Lethal vs. Petey Williams for the X title, LAX vs. Rock & Rave Infection vs. a third team

(most likely Motor City Machine Guns but they're in the doghouse right now) with Hermie Sadler as referee (Sadler is from the Norfolk area) and

Team 3-D vs. Shark Boy & Curry Man. Tickets got off to a decent start, but the current signs aren't good. They now have changed seating to where

half the arena is blocked off, and the building has been told to only sell seats on one side of the new configuration (so the seats the camera

looks at will be full). Ringside is sold out, but every other price category hasn't sold all that well. Also, there is frustration in the Norfolk market regarding a lack of publicity. As for newspaper advertising, radio advertising or TV spots during Raw or Smackdown, it's

been little if at all noticeable in the market. . . Abyss will be gone for a while and come back with a new character. Not sure how long, but indie promoters have been told they can have dates on him on any weekend,

unlike all the other talent. I believe they will still talk about him

no

television to keep his storyline alive, but he won't be wrestling. . .

They are using this show as a bridge, and focusing on Lockdown being strong. Lockdown will most likely feature Angle vs. Joe for the title

and

B.G. vs. Kip James among the bouts in the all-cage format. Lockdown

will

be held in New England. . . In a cost-cutting measure, the company has

eliminated the local promotion of on-sale days for the PPV events. The

rule of thumb ever since Zane Bresloff brought it to pro wrestling in

the

90s when the WCW live event business turned around, and WWE quickly

followed suit under Ed Cohen, was theoretically to not only make the

show

a big deal in town, but make the day tickets go on sale a big deal by

advertising the on-sale date first in the local media, sending major

stars to the city for autograph signings. The idea is that it gets a

buzz

going in the market for the show, and the stars start promoting it on

the

popular local radio stations or get on TV if possible. The rule of

thumb

is once you do that and get a relationship with the most popular media

personalities in town, you can set up call-in phone interviews once a

week leading to the show, and then follow with a big last week media

blitz. After Atlanta drew poorly, the big first day, which probably costs the company a few thousand dollars to do, was cut. The upshot is there was never any buzz in the Greenville market and sales sucked. Of course,

Atlanta also didn't do well and in the end, you can do all the great promoting you want, it's all in how many people want to see the product.

In WCW in 2000, they did all the right things from a promotional standpoint and used Jimmy Hart doing angles with the hottest local d.j.'s

to get the morning drive time show buzz and those people talking up the event, and people didn't buy tickets because they didn't have a product people would want to buy tickets for. The truth is, when you have a product people aren't buying tickets to, you end up saving money but this

again speaks to the bigger problems at hand. The one good thing is this is no longer a business where ticket and PPV sales are everything, as the

videogame-if it sells and that's a big if-is the type of thing that can be a substantial moneymaker. However, when those deals come into play, TNA needs its product or its talent to be over enough to move merchandise, not in WWE numbers, but competitive with other merchandise.

. . . When it comes to TNA wrestlers and media appearances, obviously the big one is Angle by leaps and bounds. He's the most in demand, plus

even

as much as wrestling and MMA fans get tired of his MMA talk and pretty much see through it, MMA is a hot topic on youth oriented sports talk shows and his being conversant in that makes him a popular guest. Plus, his combination of legit sports credentials and WWE fame make him a sports celebrity when he comes to town. The No. 2 most requested guest is

Nash, because he had fame from when most of the people in media were watching wrestling, plus he's charming, every sports talk guy in the country saw "The Longest Yard," and he follows major sports and has a good understanding of the mentality in those worlds and can talk all the

issues. Within TNA, they do recognize their home-grown guys like A.J. Styles and Samoa Joe don't have that "fame" to the media types whether they are good on the shows or not. However, there are many in TNA who think Christian Cage has that fame and while he was in WWE for years and

had lots of TV, and was in some very entertaining programs and even did some acting (but in movies nobody saw), to the outside of wrestling world, his name only means something to people who are big wrestling fans

as opposed to those who have a casual knowledge. . . Paul Heyman did an interview in The Sun where he said he had no interest in working here.

It

should be noted when he was finished with WWE, TNA expressed zero interest in bringing him in. Heyman said he was trying to give the

company good advice, saying TNA has no interest in somebody coming in and changing the formula of how they do things nor do they want to hear that their formula needs changing. Fact is, the company seems to not be under pressure to produce live attendance or buy rates, as the only numbers that ever get brought up are the ratings. They are frustrated they haven't moved up faster, but there is no impetus at present to change anything. He said he'd see TNA as a step down and if he wanted to be in wrestling, he'd have stayed with WWE handling the creative for the developmental program. He said he's proud of Gabe Sapolsky, who learned from the successes and failures of ECW and has developed a niche audience and branded his product better than TNA, but even the most ardent ROH fan would realize how limited it is without television. Gabe Sapolsky has expressed to me that because of that, no matter how many great matches or great shows ROH puts on, it will never influence the industry the way ECW did. Heyman, when acknowledging his contacts with IFL and YAMMA MMA groups as reported here, said he talked with IFL about being executive producer of the TV, but he didn't understand what they wanted, and felt the ring was a hindrance to the product and that when people think MMA, they think the cage. He said the ring to him is like something you see

in

old boxing films. He said he has mutual friends with Bob Meyrowitz and they talk all the time, and he's interested in seeing his product but

that

doing PPV without weekly television seems like a tough assignment. . .

The reason Team 3-D did that strange interview before the match at

Against All Odds where they buried Chris Sabin & Alex Shelley

completely,

while putting over Jay Lethal, is because the booking team scripted

Sabin

& Shelley to juice for them since they were losing their own specialty

street fight match. Sabin & Shelley both refused to juice. Basically,

Sabin refused, and Shelley does whatever Sabin says. Everyone was

shocked

being that they've never been asked before, and it was a high-profile

match. The match was re-booked to make them both look bad as they were

both laid out midway through the match with 3-Ds and Lethal worked the

match by himself. Any thoughts of giving them the tag team titles were

nixed, and right now the feeling is that they can't book them in any

heavy grudge match type programs. . . There is a degree of life

imitating

art in the Joe contract signing storyline. Joe's contract is believed

to

have some time left, but the company wants to lock him up long-term,

particularly with the idea of him getting the title for a genuine run

at

some point this year. For months, he hadn't signed a renewal. Company officials say the deal is very close and expect it'll be finalized before too long, and nobody was ever of the opinion he was leaving at any time.

. . There was definite disappointment with the wedding show ratings, since wrestling weddings always draw. But WWE weddings were never thrown

together at the last minute, but were the culmination of weeks and weeks

of build-up. Plus, they announced it on a PPV that was probably seen in 25,000 homes, and by fans who always watch TV anyway. So, basically, not

enough people were aware. TNA is wasting its time doing angles on PPV to

build for TV, both because it's annoying to the people paying, and also because it's completely ineffective. . . House show dates have been added

3/19 in Springfield,, MO, 3/21 in Evansville and 3/22 in St. Louis.

They

are going back to the Family Arena, which seats more than 10,000, for a house show. . . Notes from the 2/14 TV show. Show opened with Karen

Angle

coming out of a limo in her wedding dress. She was with her oldest daughter, Kyra, who nearly stole several scenes on the Thanksgiving show

(do you realize with Thanksgiving always being a Thursday that the Thanksgiving Impact is going to become an annual tradition—kind of like Starrcade used to be—okay, not at all like Starrcade used to be).

Jeremy

Borash was her maid of honor, a point brought up numerous times during the show. Now, I hate the overdone segments that make everyone goofs and

comedy figures, but they only did a few and on this show, every one was funny. One person in the company described Impact as the 60s TV show "Green Acres," which was a show where there was one normal character and

everyone else on the show was completely nuts, but they all thought he was the one who was nuts. The problem is, Oliver Wendell Douglas (the one

normal character) is not the champion (who actually plays a character who

would fit in on that show), the announcer (who would at least be the credibility presiding over the circus), or the commissioner (ditto).

The

closest thing to a normal person in the sea of insanity is Tomko, and he's gone back-and-forth from heel-to-face to heel so quickly that people

have no connection with him either. Eric Young came out and he was scared

to death of Rellik, because, "You know, that's Killer spelled backwards."

Seems Young was always afraid of monsters and Rellik wears a Great Muta style monster mask. Jim Cornette was out there with no table, no Kurt Angle, no Matt Morgan, to get Samoa Joe to sign. Christian came out and asked Joe to be his partner against Styles & Tomko. Joe said that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. It does work that way in wrestling.

Cornette got mad at him putting his personal business in front of company

business, and Joe then got mad at what Cornette said and left without signing. Then came the handicap match with Devon beating Shark Boy & Curry Man. They came out with his bathroom scale for weigh-ins. So cheap

looking, and so fake as well. There was so much comedy potential in skits

where both guys would have to lose weight and they did none of it, and after two weeks, killed the angle dead. Don West called Brother Ray "Bubba," which was funny, since you're not allowed to do that. Ray hit Curry Man with the scale so Devon got the pin. Scott Steiner vs. Abyss never took place as Abyss walked out and took his mask off before he left. He's expected out several months. Trenesha Biggers, who is going to

be Steiner's female second, is named Rocka Khan. There was an African American singer in the 70s named Chaka Khan. Well, she's still around now

but her peak was 30 years ago. I was hoping that Russo would claim she was the daughter of Killer Khan, but no such luck. Steiner then beat Petey Williams after a Samoan drop off the middle rope. Khan pulled

Williams' leg while he was on the top rope, so he crotched himself before the Samoan drop. Steiner then helped Williams up and patted him on the back. The problem with Biggers is she's a legit 6-2, and it totally exposes Awesome Kong, who is billed as 6-1 but is probably 5-10. Angle and Tomko talked with Angle inviting him to join the Angle Alliance. Tomko said he would join but he wasn't going to be like Styles and take orders from Kurt, or Karen, and that he wasn't going to be anybody's bitch. They went backstage and Christian was knocked out cold and laying next to a locker. This was never addressed again, or hinted at who did it, nor did Christian do a revenge promo later. Maybe it's the same guy who did the same thing to Pacman Jones his first night in. Styles & Tomko beat Joe & Nash. Styles and Tomko still weren't getting along. Joe worked most of the match so it was okay, but it was 8:25 with a commercial break, and nothing special in the ring. Angle slapped Joe and then Tomko pinned Joe after a sloppy Olympic slam. This was way too "easy" a finish on a guy who is your top babyface. Truthfully, the babyface chasing the title shouldn't job on the way to the quest, unless it's a major deal, and when he does, it should take a ton to put him down because when a face chases the title, the fans have to have belief he won't go down. Him

going down this easy makes him just another guy. Joe did a promo and said

that he and Nash and Christian would form their own group. He also talked

about his title shot at Destination X, so they are advertising a major main event that in the coming weeks they are going to take away.

Luckily

they have no ticket selling main events, because if they could have one,

Joe challenging for the title should be it, and then they'd be selling tickets locally with a major match they know full well they aren't

delivering. Rellik pinned Young after a clothesline. Young acted scared

of him. In the three-way, Homicide pinned Rave. Third guy in the match

was Sabin. This had all the NASCAR drivers. Juan Pablo Montoya and Reed

Sorenson in corners of Homicide and Sabin respectively. Hermie Sadler

announced with Jimmy Spencer and Sadler interviewed everyone. They also

had Lance Hoyt, Christy Hemme, Hernandez and Shelley at ringside. It

was

brutal. The finish saw Hoyt shove down Sadler, so Montoya hit Hoyt with

a

terrible looking chair shot, which Hoyt had to oversell. While this was

going on, Homicide pinned Rave. The whole match lasted only 2:33. The

in-ring action was very good while it lasted, but I don't think anyone

noticed. They were looking to get TNA some coverage on The Speed

Channel

and other NASCAR news shows. Rhino did a promo saying he had been gone

because Storm had reintroduced alcohol to his life, but now he's clean and wants the Elevation X match. ODB did a promo. I think she called the

Knockouts title the "Knocked Up" title. They need to keep her away from promos. She gets over without them and she can't get over doing them. Kong pinned ODB with the implant buster in a street fight, which is the name for the pedigree like move on women with implants. The finish saw Gail Kim, who came out during ODB's promo saying she'd watch her back, getting involved but she ended up colliding with ODB just before the finish. They argued, and ended up with a pull apart. Booker spent the whole show supposed at the front entrance waiting for Roode, who never showed up. Cornette said that was no way to settle things and he can't have Booker scaring his wrestlers away from appearing, so he told him next week he'd get a match with Angle. Yep, the first Angle vs. Booker match is on free TV, although it's not like Angle vs. Sting which correctly promoted could have done some business, so it's not really that

big of a deal. Main event was the wedding. Ernest Angel, who just a few weeks ago was on this show in the role of Styles' football coach, was now

the preacher. The funny thing is, that same show had a guy play a preacher. It's absolutely mind numbing they'd have so little respect for

their own product to do that just a few weeks apart. I didn't know this,

but I guess this whole wedding deal was a takeoff of an episode of the

TV

show "Alice." Styles was Kurt's reluctant best man, but he has the hots for Karen. Kurt was wearing the title belt as his cummerbund. Kurt & Karen's facials were so awesome, in the sense they were acting like a couple getting married. Kurt told Angel that whenever he said his name, to call him "12 time world champion and Olympic gold medalist" so he kept saying that. Just before they were to be pronounced man and wife, Joe and Nash came out. A big brawl erupted and yes, why not, we had a preacher bump and run-ins in a TNA main event. Joe and Nash stripped Angle of his tuxedo and left him in his underwear. So when the preacher got up and his glasses were knocked off, he saw Styles with Karen and pronounced them man and wife and Styles kissed Karen as Karen and Kurt looked stunned.

UFC/WEC: On buy rate news, UFC 79, which we never got a number for, was one of the bigger ones in history. We still don't have a number but 600,000 to 675,000 seems like the range, and may challenge for third place of all-time with late buys. It looks to have beaten UFC 81 in buys, but because of the \$5 price increase for UFC 81, the dollar figures with both shows, as well as the Liddell vs. Jackson match, are all in the same neighborhood. The report we got is that 79 and 81 were fairly close in

the U.S. but that 79 was significantly higher in Canada, which is the Georges St. Pierre factor. It appears there was more interest in Lesnar vs. Mir than Liddell vs. Silva based on comparisons of breaking down interest level of matches and interest in the results, but St Pierre vs.

Hughes (which actually had significantly less interest than Silva vs. Liddell even though it was pushed as the main event) was a very strong No. 2 match and helped draw. The lack of casual interest in Tim Sylvia vs. Antonio Rodrigo Nogueira is shocking. In tracking Internet searches on individual matches, Lesnar vs. Mir and Silva vs. Liddell were very strong at 1 and 2, St. Pierre vs. Hughes was fairly good but a very distant third, followed by Stevenson vs. Penn. Nogueira vs. Sylvia was so

low it wouldn't even track a pulse. . . This would give Liddell three of

the top four in history, with the top ten at this point: 1. Liddell vs. Tito Ortiz; 2. Ortiz vs. Ken Shamrock; 3. Liddell vs. Quinton Jackson; 4.

Liddell vs. Wanderlei Silva; 5. Royce Gracie vs. Matt Hughes; 6. Brock Lesnar vs. Frank Mir; 7. Randy Couture vs. Tim Sylvia; 8. Couture vs. Gabriel Gonzaga; 9. Liddell vs. Renato Sobral; 10. Liddell vs. Keith Jardine. . .Matt Lindland, who is looking for a new place to fight after

Bodog went down (so much for a \$1 million or so contract with a company backed by a super rich dude), was turned down by UFC. He was on Frank Trigg's radio show and said Joe Silva called him and said UFC was not

going to make an offer for him. A lot of people have misinterpreted the Lindland situation, and it's the same for Ken Shamrock. Right or wrong, UFC has always been at war with IFL ever since IFL took some key UFC employees when they started up. The IFL has been both business and personal with UFC. There is no chance anyone with an IFL coaching job will fight in UFC. If Lindland were to get out of his IFL deal, the situation would be different. It would definitely not be a lock if IFL closes down or Lindland leaves IFL that UFC would take him back as Dana White evidently doesn't believe he's marketable. Because of his look, Lindland has been categorized as boring and not marketable in the past. But he's a good fighter, and the last fights I've seen him in were anything but boring, and he actually is very good on promos. Lindland's contract was with Bodog Fights, and not with the larger Bodog company.

He

was fired by UFC because they had banned anyone wearing T-shirts at UFC public events for companies that were business rivals to their

sponsors,

and Lindland, after being warned, did so. Since then, there had been negotiations to bring him back, but the IFL thing got in the way. Then, when there was interest in bringing him back, that's when Bodog gave him

that ridiculous money offer and there was no way he was turning that down, but then Bodog reneged on its deal because of how expensive it was.

. . In U.S. bankruptcy court, Judge Mike Nakagawa gave Zyen, the corporation set up by the Fertittas, approval for a \$2.6 million loan

to

keep Xyience afloat and continue their sponsorship of UFC events. The company will focus its promotion on its Xenergy energy drink which will be sold at stores and carry a UFC logo on the can. Nakagawa said he was faced with no real option because without the loan, Xyience would likely

have to close up. A group of unsecured creditors and original stockholders in the company were fighting against the ruling saying it would only benefit the Fertittas, and they characterized it as a loan-to-own strategy where they would take over the company without incurring its previous debt and for far less money than buying out the stockholders. At first the Fertittas offered a \$1 million loan to keep the company going, but when the judge wasn't happy with it, they offered

to increase it to \$2.6 million and got approval. The money to keep going

allowed Xyience to keep its shelf space on grocery and convenience stores, which it would lose if it couldn't continue operation temporarily. It would have to discard \$8 million worth of products with no shelf space to sell them. . Among notes in the case is the original \$12 million loan Zyen gave Xyience was a one-year note with 15% interest.

If the loan was defaulted on, Zyen would get a substantial amount of company stock. As the largest secured creditor, if the company isn't sold

or doesn't have a quick business turnaround, the Fertittas company will

end up with ownership of the new company, which one way or the other,
is
the expected outcome of all this. . . The 2/13 WEC show on Versus did a
0.5 rating and 468,000 viewers. It was down from the 0.7 that the prior
show did, but nobody expected differently since they advertised that
show
far heavier with Uriah Faber and Jens Pulver both on it. Even with less
advertising (at least from what I could gather, as nobody alerted me to
any mainstream advertising of the show), it beat most of the prior
shows
that had done in the 0.4 range. 0.5 is considered an excellent number
for
the low-rated Versus channel. . . I saw a casting call for what is
billed
as a network show that is starring Tito Ortiz. "Do you have a beef with
someone and tried everything to solve it but can't? Did your best
friend
steal your girl? Did your old roommate shaft you on your rent? Did you
have a falling out with your best friend and have no way to solve it?
The
story would be that Ortiz would train the guys and then at the end of
the
show they would fight "in the Octagon." Contestants must live in
Southern
California. . . Wanderlei Silva returned to Brazil and was
incommunicado

for weeks, but just got back to Las Vegas this week and was approached about doing the 5/24 fight with Keith Jardine. We didn't hear it was confirmed but he did an interview talking about it giving the impression

he thought it was his next fight. Silva has also talked openly about, win

or lose, moving down to middleweight to face Anderson Silva, feeling he may be too short (5-11) for the UFC's light heavyweight division.

Moving

down in weight kills a Liddell rematch, which was still by far his biggest money potential fight. If UFC wants a rematch, I'm sure he'll take it, but after Chuck Liddell vs. Mauricio "Shogun" Rua, if Liddell wins, there is no point in Liddell facing anyone but the champion. If

Rua

wins, they can do Liddell vs. Silva again, but it'll have less

importance. . . Liddell vs. Rua is now official for the 6/14 show in

London as the main event so whatever problems Liddell had with fighting in London have been cleared up. Very interesting putting Liddell on a

U.K. show because U.K. PPV events up to this point haven't drawn

anywhere

near what shows from the U.S. have and Liddell is the top draw. Of

course

we've never had a true marquee U.K. show on PPV, as Rich Franklin vs.

Yushin Okami was a TV card that fell through and was put on PPV, and

UFC

80 was sandwiched between two mega-events and only had one person on

the

show (Penn) that had even the semblance of drawing power. . . Fabricio

Werdum vs. Brandon Vera is being negotiated for that same show, but

isn't

signed. . . Liddell's autobiography, such as it is, was No. 9 for the

second straight week on the New York Times bestseller list. . . Cain

Velasquez, 2-0, joins Brock Lesnar and Shane Carwin as top college

wrestlers who are recent heavyweight signees. Velasquez debuts on 4/19

in

Montreal, The Arizona State product was Pac-10 wrestler of the year

overall in 2005, and heavyweight champion in 2005 and 2006, as well as

placed 5th in the 2005 NCAA tournament and 4th in 2006. In 2006, he

went

to the final four, and went to a 2-2 overtime draw with eventual

champion

Cole Konrad of Minnesota, losing on criteria points. During his career

at

Arizona State, he held a win over Konrad, who was the best heavyweight

in

college wrestling of that era, as well as Jake Hager, who is currently

with WWE developmental. Carwin, a former NCAA Division II national

champion and All-American linebacker, debuts on 5/24 in Las Vegas. No

opponents have been signed for either fighter. . . Mirko Cro Cop signed

a

three-fight deal with the Dream promotion, but his split with UFC

really

was amicable. He spoke with both Dana White and Joe Silva and made it clear that he wanted to come back to UFC and recognized that based on his performance, they couldn't continue to book him at the rate he was making. Because he already made his rep in Japan, and they don't care a lick about wins and losses outside of Japan (and if you're a star, don't care that much even in Japan), he could continue to get big money in Japan. The gist is if he goes on a tear, UFC may bring him back. He said when he fought in Japan, he'd go into the ring with the mentality that he was going to kill his opponent, but for some reason, in UFC he did not have that mentality. . . Matt Hughes probably won't fight again until facing Matt Serra, which will be booked if Serra loses to Georges St. Pierre. If Serra wins, not sure what would happen as if Jon Fitch beats Chris Wilson, Fitch would probably then face Serra. . . Roger Huerta is back in college for the semester working on his degree. He asked to take a hiatus from fighting until finishing college. . .Right now there is nothing on the books for Brock Lesnar. He's not penciled in for London, or any shows currently on the schedule, and no decision has been made on where to go with him next or when. There are two schools of thought, one being that they'll put him against another big name fighter and try and

make it a strong money match, and the other is to book him as a first or second match with a lower level opponent who he would have a better shot at beating. They do like what he brings to the table in terms of potential, not to mention drawing power, and aren't looking to get him beat to prove pro wrestlers can't win in MMA or any kind of mentality like that. If they do run the Target Center in Minneapolis later this year, he'd pretty much be a lock to be in a strong match on that show. But there's virtually no shot his next opponent will be Tim Sylvia. . . Nate Diaz vs. Kurt Pellegrino has been added to the 4/2 show in Broomfield, CO, on Spike. . . The 4/2 show is scheduled at this moment as a two-hour live special, followed by the first episode of the new season of Ultimate Fighter. It has been reported that the show, because the card is so deep for a television card, would be expanded to three hours. At press time that decision was not final, but it's definitely being talked about. . . At the WEC show, the Ox Wheeler vs. Del Hawkins match, that didn't even appear on television, that people were raving about, got best match. Each got a \$7,500 bonus. Also bonused on the show were Miguel Torres for best submission and Jamie Varner for best knockout. Each got \$7,500. Even though Torres was listed on the show as having a 20-1

record, he actually has a documented 33-1 record and may be one of the best pound-for-pound fighters in the world. . . Alexandre Franca

Nogueira, 13-4-2, who has been one of the top featherweights in Shooto for years, is said to signing with the WEC. He was Shooto champion at 143

pounds from September 1999 to May 2006, when had to vacate the title due

to a knee injury. Shooto has been the top organization in Japan for that

weight class, since Pride and Hero's never booked the division.

K-1/DREAM: Rumors of a Fedor Emelianenko vs. Mirko Cro Cop match gained steam when Sadaharu Tanigawa said he wanted the match to take place this

summer. Keiichi Sasahara, who is running the Dream show for Tanigawa, said he would try and work with M-1 to make it happen. Tanigawa also said

that for Cro Cop's first opponent back, presumably on the 3/15 show in Saitama, he's looking at either Semmy Schilt, Choi Hong-man, Mighty Mo and Sergey Kharitonov. Because Cro Cop is primary a striker and the first

three are strikers who are twice his size, even though he's a far bigger

MMA star, they are not easy matches. Choi was an easy opponent for Fedor

because once it got to the ground wasn't going to be able to block submissions, but with Cro Cop, as unskilled as he is, his size makes

him

a dangerous foe in a pure stand-up match.

EXC: Gina Carano will not be on the 3/29 show in San Jose. It was never confirmed, but after they couldn't make a deal for 2/16, they were shooting for San Jose. Now they are shooting for May, but the sides are not seeing eye-to-eye. Carano was on "Inside MMA" and didn't talk much about it, but said she would fight again "after April," because there would be a second season of Gladiators filming in March and April.

OTHER MMA: Akira Maeda, who was officially announced as being no longer affiliated with K-1, said he wished the new Dream promotion well. He announced he was starting a new promotion, called Outsider. He was looking to discover unknown Japanese talent on his shows with the first show on 3/30 at Differ Ariake. . . How's this for crazy stuff. A show

on

2/23 called the Rockford Rumble is being headlined by 50-year-old

former

NFL superstar and Four Horsemen member Steve McMichael, who still goes

by

the Mongo nickname given to him in WCW. McMichael faces Sammy Walker,

39,

a former Green Bay Packers defensive back, in Rockford as a Bears vs.

Packers gimmick. Actually, Walker only spent one season, 1993, with the

Packers, and McMichael was on the team (he finished his career in Green

Bay in 1994 after 13 years with the Bears) for as long as Walker.

McMichael apparently had his first match a few weeks ago against

Gilbert

Brown, another former Packer, in Milwaukee. McMichael currently coaches with the Chicago Slaughter of the Continental Indoor Football League.

WWE: Some notes from the last conference call regarding the movie business. There will be no WWE Film releases in 2008. They are working on

several projects, the next big one being "12 Rounds," the movie starring

John Cena which is already in pre-production and is going in with a budget in excess of \$20 million, with the plans for a theatrical release.

The first Cena movie was a moneymaker, particularly doing well in the DVD

market. They also have "a few" projects they are working on for direct-to-video, one of which already has a studio that is co-financing it with them. The direct-to-video releases are going in with a \$4 million

to \$5 million range budget. They expect several releases for 2009.

Renny

Harlin will be directing the movie, which lists Cena, Steve Harris,

Aidan

Gillen and Brian White as the stars and Daniel Kunka as the head writer.

Harlin most recently directed "The Cleaner" with Samuel L. Jackson. The movie starts filming on 2/25 and Cena will be living in New Orleans from

that point forward, only coming up for air when he's needed for

television. Fox has signed on as the distributor. Cena plays a New Orleans police officer whose girlfriend is kidnapped. Sounds familiar.

.
. In an effort to boost the morale of stockholders as well as rise the value of the stock, the company, if they get a favorable tax ruling from the IRS, will increase the dividends to shareholders from 24 cents per share to 36 percent, which is a strong 8.6% yield at the current prices.

It's not as big as it sounds because it is only for outside shareholders.

The Vince McMahon and family stock would pay on 24 cents per share until

March 2011, when it will also increase. The current dividend is \$17.28 million per quarter, of which just under \$12 million each quarter goes to

Vince. The McMahons will continue to receive \$12 million, but the starting in March if this goes through, the quarterly dividend will total

about \$19.92 million. The day this was announced, the stock price increased to \$17.20 per share. . . The Hall of Fame Ceremony will air at

11 p.m. on 3/29. I'm guessing they'll air the Flair induction (HHH is most likely presenter) and The Rock's return inducting his father and grandfather (still not 100% confirmed but as of the last I'd heard the company was expecting it). . . Being that he's been quiet since his

release, it would appear Lashley agreed to terms that included agreeing not to say anything negative in public about the company. We don't know the terms of the release, but do know that in the original release he was given that he didn't sign, that was among WWE's terms. WWE had the leverage advantage in some ways, in that Lashley had a long time left on his contract, and as an athlete at the age of 31, he needs to be able to make money with that athletic ability. I could be wrong on this one, but this is one case where I think he made the wrong decision as he had a hell of a future and no matter where he goes, he's going to end up working just as hard for a fraction of the money. Plus, if he comes back, I don't know he'll be given the same type of chances because the company will have those thoughts in the back of their mind that he may leave again if he's mad about money, or working conditions, or the schedule.

.
. In an interesting twist on the Georgia athletic commission regulation story, because of the high costs involved, the belief is it will significantly decrease small-level MMA and boxing shows. A\$1,000 per show fee was listed as a possibility as the price of getting a permit. The current cost is \$250 per show for MMA. While not as united as the

wrestling community, which has attended hearings en masse, the MMA community is as much against the bill. . . I do want to make a cryptic remark about things I'm not really allowed to talk about because Cena does a lot of great things that he's not looking for pub for that you'll rarely hear about. There are good and bad guys in the profession and good and bad performers and people can react however they want. Some guys in the business don't like him and some do. Some perceive him as being too close to management and not one of the boys and other will say he's down to Earth considering all the fame he's had. It's very difficult for someone to get super hot in this business and not get a sense of entitlement and it go to their heads. It's just human nature. There are always exceptions. I've never seen a babyface at his level that gets booed so much take it in stride, but that's all performing anyway. But when you get away from the wrestling business, Cena is a great person outside the ring and isn't looking for credit or medals for it and probably doesn't even care if anyone knows it. . . The advance out for Wrestlemania is currently at 60,000 with roughly 10,000 left. . . The company is doing a marketing survey for a new tag line, such as "The New Generation," "The Attitude Era," and "What the World is Watching." Different names being considered are "Let Us Entertain You," "It's On," "Where the story never ends," "Real Entertainment," "The Ultimate Thrill Ride," and "It's Unreal." . . In an interview with the Miami Herald,

Austin said he was given a role for Wrestlemania but had turned it down.

Before the writers strike ended, Austin was in line for some non-WWE movie roles. He also has two movies left on his WWE contract. He said he

wants to go to the Hall of Fame ceremony this year. He said he could wrestle, but doesn't want to. Austin has told friends he physically feels

he could do two more years, but doesn't want to go out and be less than he was or risk his health for later in life. "If I really needed the money, I'd go back in the ring, but I've been conservative with my money

and invested wisely. I have fond memories of the business and I love the business, but I don't miss it." He said he hasn't ruled out an angle at Mania, but feels it is unlikely. He said Michael Hayes was the one who taught him the stunner. On Shark Boy, "I've heard about it. It doesn't anger me. If a guy is able to make a living on a rip-off, a spoof, making

fun of me, whatever. I'm still with WWE. More power to him." He wishes he

could have worked singles matches with Andre the Giant, Harley Race, Dusty Rhodes and Jack Brisco. On UFC 81: "It was a wonderful night of fights. I met Dana White. He is an extremely nice guy. The Lesnar fight was an outstanding fight. I think Lesnar would have won if they didn't stop it. He did very well against a former world champion." He said he initiated his friendship with Kennedy as he saw him work a TV match

with

Batista and thought he did a good job and got his number and called him up out of the blue and they became friends from there. Austin said Kennedy is going to be a big star as long as they leave him alone and let

him do his thing. . . Austin, who came up with the Flair winning streak idea at last year's Wrestlemania weekend, when he was mad that WWE wasn't

doing more with Flair, said that he hasn't been pleased with how his creation turned out. Austin told Mike Mooneyham that he hasn't been following it that closely, but didn't think he was getting the farewell that he deserved. Realistically, the fact he is doing his final shot in all these cities, and it's not pushed—and in many of the cities it would

be a ticket seller—is disappointing. The angle doesn't allow for farewell

stuff, and that's killing the momentum. Austin, who said Flair was his favorite wrestler ever, said, "I don't think they green-lighted that thing near enough or made it as important as it could be and as it should

be." Austin has for years always said he believes Flair to be the greatest wrestler of all-time, and the best touring champion ever. On the

current product, he said he sees too any wrestlers with gimmicks not suited for them. "I see so many guys and girls out there these days trying to be something they're truly not. And if they're cutting a

promo

that's unfortunately been written for them and they don't believe it,

they can say it a million times, but I can look in their eyes and

listen

to their delivery, and I can see it's not coming from their gut and

their

heart, and it's not even coming from their brain. Another person

directly

involved told us they couldn't agree more with Austin on the angle. The

blame, if there is any, is that it was not a Brian Gewirtz idea, nor an

angle involving a wrestler that he "gets" (Gewirtz did watch wrestling

as

a kid, but only WWF, and never saw Flair in his prime or at all until

2002). "This should be a fun ride, almost a 'This is your life' type

storyline mixed in with issues involving a 16-time champion in the

twilight of his career," noted someone at one time involved with the

angle. They said things should have been used out of the Rocky movie,

the

Randy Couture story, self doubt, a quest for one last title miracle win

(which everyone expected to be part of the story but they haven't even

gotten near that and the only match where the one last miracle win

thing

came in was HHH in Greensboro and I still can't get over how they did a

finish where the only goal was to set up a totally forgettable TV match

the next week. They haven't brought back old rivals and friends, shown

career highlights, and aside from the 12/31 show and the HHH match

(until the finish), every aspect of this has been just a quick match and gone except the few times with MVP and Kennedy that he got to talk, and those did well. Almost every time, his segment has gained substantial audience although there have been exceptions to that when it's just been thrown out there. This needs to be based on history and portraying Flair as the Babe Ruth or Johnny Unitas of this business, appearing for the last time in cities, talking about his history in cities like Atlanta, Philadelphia, Greensboro, etc. The only place they really had him do a promo, was a few seconds at Madison Square Garden and was interrupted to make it mean nothing. In the end, it goes right back to the deal where Vince didn't create Flair, so as much as HHH respects him and puts him over, his career and legacy represents the people Vince fought against for all those years. I'm not sure TNA wouldn't have booked this angle better. . . My belief is, regarding JBL, they should work through Mania and then evaluate everything. Unless JBL is needed because the Raw side is a little weak on the heel side, and he can get over as a main event heel, I think there is more value in him as an announcer. Of course there are mitigating factors, such as how his outside business are doing and from his standpoint, a full-time high card performer in WWE is going to

earn far more than even a very effective announcer. There are a lot of ways they can go about it. I also don't think it's a sin to have an announcer who competes more regularly. Again, it's early, but thus far my feeling is JBL fits better on Smackdown than Raw, and the role of an announcer who is a near the top heel on PPV shows and works as a semi-regular on the house show circuit (a role Roddy Piper did as a face in the past), whose TV appearances as a wrestler are limited to angles, promos and a very rare match can be effective. . . JBL did an interview with the Long Island Press and said making the switch back was a tough decision to make. He said that when he turned 41 he realized if he waited much longer, he'd be too old to come back. He said he retired because his back was hurting so bad, but in the time off, it had gotten better. He said during his last run, because of his back problems, he was fat and out of shape at the end and wasn't happy with how he went out. He said he came back so he could end his career the way he wanted to, and that means more to him than job security as an announcer. Well, I'd have to think when the time comes that he does stop wrestling he should have an open door to go back. On "Between The Ropes," he said he felt his program with Jericho was decent, but only because he's in with Jericho, who "made me

probably look better than what I am." Now that's scary, but he did say

he

feels he's getting in better shape and getting his mind back into performing. He said he's not in shape yet and is at 60 to 70% mentally.

He said he's looking at two or three years, but his health will make the

decision for him. . . After what we wrote last week concerning the Hall of Fame, Jim Ross again brought up Gordon Solie and Jack & Jerry Brisco.

We've since had independent confirmation that all three are on the "strongly considered" list. The "strongly considered" list is what appears to be the list, but nothing is official until the names are released and in the end, it's Vince's decision based on what he's feeling

when he makes the decision. Ross also brought up Eddie Graham, who was the architect of the Florida territory during its heyday from the mid-60s

through the early 80s. Graham was considered by the people who worked and

learned from him (including Bill Watts, who largely credits Graham, Verne

Gagne and Roy Shire as the people he learned booking from) to be a booking genius. I saw enough Florida in the glory days to agree with that. Graham was also a main event wrestler in the 50s and 60s, and has going for him that Dr. Jerry & Eddie Graham were Vince's favorite tag team as a teenager (huge plus), not to mention the show is in Florida,

there was a 3,000-seat arena in Orlando that was named the Eddie Graham Sports Stadium that ran wrestling weekly, and the Florida heritage is important to WWE because of FCW. Plus a lot of the producers cut their teeth in the Florida territory. I had not heard Graham's name. The negative is with Solie and Peter Maivia, that's two deceased people and a few months back the feeling was they wanted to limit it to one to keep it a positive affair. . . Ross commented on the Lashley release on his web site, saying Lashley didn't like the travel demands. He also said he didn't think Lashley fully understood the business of sports entertainment. I take that remark to mean that Lashley should have been happy making \$1 million last year and didn't understand how they handle pay. I think the problem was Lashley had heard about guys making so much at Mania and this show was the biggest grossing wrestling event in history. Ross noted that Lashley's pay was one of the best he can recall for anyone at his stage of his career. He said he'd dispute any claims Lashley wasn't treated fairly financially (Ross still does the actual payoffs). He noted wrestling relationships often don't stand the test of time. He then hinted at Lashley vs. Lesnar in a UFC match. Lashley has been quiet since the release was signed, which may be an indication part of the agreement was that both sides wouldn't disparage the other

publicly. What we do know about the release is WWE is paying Lashley on his contract until late May and then Lashley is free to go anywhere he chooses, including TNA. The fact they didn't insist on him at least not going to TNA at the least, or TNA or UFC, indicates he had something on them enough that they would give up keeping him work for TNA for the duration of the contract to keep him quiet. The strong expectation is he's going to TNA and not to MMA, as Angle and Booker have both been pushing for him to come in. As noted, WWE definitely at this point wasn't

looking at defending themselves against prospective racial claims. Some have read more into Lashley being represented by Duane Zinkin, the Fresno-based agent who also represents many MMA stars, particularly those

based in San Jose, than it necessarily means. Zinkin has been representing Lashley since 2004 and was his rep all through his WWE tenure. It's not that he's just picked up an MMA agent, but, because he was originally training for MMA when WWE came through with an offer that

he took, that's who his agent is. The big questions regarding the release

would be UFC and TNA, as those are obviously the places WWE would least like to see him go, although they seem to not have problems with UFC right now. From a legal standpoint, it would be harder to enforce a UFC non-compete than one of TNA. Lashley is friends with both Booker T and Kurt Angle and having been out of competition for four years, pro wrestling may be a better bet for him than starting from almost scratch

at 31 for MMA. Lashley did have a big buzz on him locally when he briefly trained for MMA, because he had great wrestling, tremendous strength and naturally heavy hands. UFC doesn't appear to have expressed major interest in him, at least that I've heard. And it's probably best for his career to work smaller shows for a year or two and make a rep. He could probably get strong paydays with Elite XC, or perhaps hook up with YAMMA and fight guys in their 40s who have names and earn more money for the year than TNA. If he could become a genuine star, it's also more lucrative short-term than TNA. However, TNA has far less risk of failure, as a few high-profile losses in MMA and he could have nothing. . .

Don't know all the details, but Vince McMahon has had a major philosophical change regarding the role of the announcer of a wrestling match. For years McMahon has wanted to get away from calling move-by-move (this began in the 90s when all sorts of new moves came to the U.S. from Japan and Mexico, and when Vince was announcing, rather than learn, he justified not doing so by feeling calling moves wasn't important) and concentrate on hyping and telling stories. Now he's changing even farther in that direction. It used to be considered a badge of honor in the old

days when Gordon Solie or Larry Matysik or Jim Ross would hear from a blind person who would say that they could see the match based on commentary. Well, that's not what it wanted. . . Game developer White Wolf filed suit in Atlanta against WWE for gimmick infringement. White Wolf created the name Gangrel for a Vampire character in the game. When WWE introduced David Heath as Gangrel, the sides came to a quick and amicable resolution where the WWE licensed from White Wolf the rights to

the Gangrel name for five years. In 2003, the license expired. WWE refused to renew the deal but used Gangrel several times since then.

WWE

is claiming it has the rights based on fair usage while White Wolf says they have deliberately infringed on their intellectual property. . .

Notes from the 2/18 Raw in Anaheim. Show opened with HHH out, letting us

all know he's coming to Wrestlemania to become a 12-time champion.

Funny

how the guy who always insists he's not keeping track is the guy who always brings it up. Orton came out, and then Cena came out. With the three together in the ring, Cena just came across as a much bigger star than the other two in the way he handled the mic. He made fun of Orton losing his way into the Wrestlemania main event and challenged him to a rematch. HHH said he didn't care because in the end, he'll beat either one. Regal then came on the stage and ordered a non-title match, and if Cena won, the Mania main event would be a three-way. HHH protested, saying he won the right to a singles match for the title. Regal told

him

he would referee the match on the show. Hardy pinned Snitsky in 10:26 to qualify for the Money in the Bank ladder match at Mania. Hardy has new music, which is going to take some getting used to. Definitely hurt his pop coming out. They noted that everyone who has won the Money in the Bank match had gone on to win the title. Sort of not true, since

Kennedy

won last year and he's still looking for the title, but Edge did beat

him

for the contract and then used it to win the title. Lots of "boring" chants which you don't get often in a Hardy match. But it wasn't good, topped off by a whisper in the wind off the ropes that totally missed

but

Snitsky sold it anyway. Finish was a twist of fate and swanton.

Michaels

came out and announced Flair in the Hall of Fame. Michaels put him over,

but saying Flair was his hero as a kid and why he got into this line of work and that nobody deserves to be in the Hall of Fame more than this man. He called Flair the greatest wrestler of all-time and his friend.

I'd settle for just being the greatest wrestler of all-time. They

played

a video of Flair clips. Not enough old stuff when he was in his prime

but

you know how that goes. They came back and the reaction was

underwhelming. Kind of surprising. They pushed that Flair is the first

active wrestler in history to be inducted into the Hall of Fame. Hulk Hogan? Roddy Piper? Greg Valentine? Jimmy Valiant (in 1996) ? Jerry Lawler? Jimmy Snuka (in 1996)? Burchill pinned Crazy in 1:56 with the curbstomp. Ross mentioned that he couldn't come up with any brother and sister combination in WWE. Oh God, Lawler jumped back with Shane & Stephanie. I just kept thinking he needed to bite into a Trix bar so the rest of the world would freeze while he could come up with an explanation. But never happened. There was also Ken & Ryan Shamrock, who were originally to do this incest angle except Ken refused because he was already doing it, which is probably where they got the idea from. I'm not sure why this is, because when Katie Lea was on OVW, she was just another pretty girl who could wrestle better than most. But on Raw, I think because she has a different look than all the other women, she stands out of the pack. Orton was backstage telling HHH to screw Cena because it's better for everyone since Wrestlemania should be a singles match. HHH then made fun of Orton by saying, "Who taught you how to play mind games." Show came out saying he wanted to apologize to Mayweather. Mayweather came out and he was booed out of the building. He's got the double whammy going. First, Mayweather is a heel in boxing. Second,

they

are in Anaheim which is close enough to De La Hoya country. Both guys said they did what they did because they were looking for publicity.

Mayweather said he was the best fighter in the world and when he was called out, he had to retaliate. Show said the only reason Mayweather hurt him was because he was on his knees, and even on his knees, he's bigger than Mayweather. He also said he never called Mayweather out.

Show

offered his hand, Mayweather paused and teased, and then shook it and left, . As he was halfway down the aisle, Show changed his tune, acting like he only apologized because he was told to, and then said he could have destroyed Mayweather with the snap of his fingers and challenged him

to a match. Mayweather came back after much goading by Show who billed it

as the world's best fighter (boxer yes, fighter no) against the world's biggest athlete (not in a world where Choi exists). Show was clearly treated as a babyface here, particularly since Mayweather had his entourage with him at all times, and with Mayweather hated by the crowd big-time to begin with, when a pro wrestler on a pro wrestling show faces

off a half dozen outsiders, the wrestler is going to have a very difficult time being the heel. Kennedy pinned Venis in 2:20 with the mic

check in a Money in the Bank qualifier. The Vince vs. Hornswoggle cage match was never a match. Hornswoggle came out with Finlay. Vince kept

ordering Finlay out of the cage. Finlay kept yelling at Vince for what he was doing. As Finlay was near the door, JBL came out and slammed the cage door on Finlay and handcuffed him to the corner to make him watch. Vince pulled off his belt and whipped Hornswoggle a few times although it looked very clumsy and not brutal. The emotion was strong because Finlay was absolutely fantastic in the corner, struggling to get free. JBL came out with this stoic heel face and destroyed Hornswoggle and laid some shots into Finlay, but mostly made Finlay watch. Hornswoggle was kicked, elbow dropped and given a fallaway slam into the cage and left laying. For emotion, JBL and Finlay plus Hornswoggle's facials made this way more dramatic than most WWE angles, but there were a lot of "boring" chants live and live reports said aspects of it got over but most thought it was too long. Ross and Lawler sold it in that hushed tone. Marella and Maria came out. Marella said that Maria had signed a contract to pose in Playboy and they were both acting like they were up for it. Then Marella talked about how dirty Playboy was by putting a clause in the contract

that Maria would have to beat Phoenix to pose, and pretended to be all shocked. Phoenix came out and was destroying Maria until Candice Michelle

returned and distracted Phoenix, allowing Maria to schoolgirl Phoenix and

get the pin. Crowd was dead during the match. They showed a close-up of Marella's immediate reaction of shock and being upset, but then Marella,

Michelle and Maria were in the aisle celebrating together. I guess they wanted to keep the Maria/Marella dynamic going, which is a strong one and

I think the right move, while letting everyone know Marella tried to screw with her and keep her from doing it. Main event was Cena pinning Orton in 14:04 with HHH as ref. HHH reffed fair, counting evenly on both

sides. What made this match interesting is the crowd, while reacting at times, was overall not hot at all for the match. Without the crowd fighting with itself and the usual Cena atmosphere, you are left with the

match and it was clumsy again. Crowd was split, and started booing Cena more the longer the match went. Cena blocked the RKO and used the STFU, but after teasing tapping, Orton made the ropes. HHH and Cena ended up having words and face-off, and Orton charged after Cena to jump him, but

Cena sidestepped him, got him up and delivered the FU for the pin. HHH then immediately gave Cena a pedigree to a huge babyface pop. He then

gave Orton a pedigree as well and stood over both of them. Lots of people were mad that there was no dark match because at the house show in Los Angeles two night earlier, they pushed hard since the advance was so-so that the main event on Raw would be DX vs. Orton & Kennedy, and then didn't deliver. . . Notes from the 2/19 tapings in San Diego. ECW, taped first since it was a West Coast taping, opened with Flair doing the promo about how honored he is to be in this wonderful company (which would be easier to take if it wasn't scripted for him ahead of time) and for fear people might realize he can deliver a promo, before it got too long-winded, Burke came out. Burke talked about how Vince McMahon personally chose him to be the leader of the New Breed. I can't believe Vince let that one through, considering how they've practically erased a guy Vince was personally endorsing as the future top heel a year ago. Burke noted that when he was a kid, he looked up to Flair. Benjamin came out next and said for years, Flair was the gold standard of wrestling, but now he's the gold standard. One thing led to another, and Flair hit one, they double-teamed him, Punk made the save, and we've got a tag team main event courtesy of Estrada. Kingston pinned Jason Riggs in 2:29 with

the enzuigiri, or the Jamaican buzzsaw if you like. Riggs was in developmental in 2005 and then cut. He looked green. Kingston comes off as having a personality, cool theme music, and they are trying to give him distinct mannerisms like a catch phrase (bam bam bam) and hand mannerisms but nobody understands them. At least being on the West Coast before a sellout crowd and going on before Smackdown, people were kind of into it. Miz pinned Delaney in 2:28 with a kneelift and the reality check. Morrison and Dreamer were in the corners. Morrison interfered and ref Mike Posey kicked him out. After the match, Dreamer attacked Miz, but Morrison came back and used his corkscrew neckbreaker on Dreamer. Miz & Morrison gave Delaney a face plant and left both guys laying. Kelly congratulated Maria on getting in Playboy. She did a promo talking about how some day maybe she'll be lucky enough to take her clothes off in that magazine. Her delivery of the promo was atrocious. Talk about being robotic and fake. Richards pinned James Curtis in 2:00 with a double arm DDT. Richards got a nice reaction. They played up his coming back from all the neck surgeries hard in this match. They need to put him in something meaningful because people are burning out on the cheer him because he underwent all those operations sympathy. Main was Flair &

Punk

over Burke & Benjamin in 10:15. Flair worked most of the match selling. Highlight was Burke playing Flair by poking Flair in the eyes, climbing to the top rope, and Flair slamming him off the top. Flair sidestepped the Elijah experience and won clean with a figure four. Crowd was way more into this than any ECW main event in a long time. I wouldn't call it

a great match by any stretch, but everyone played their roles well.

After

the show went off the air, Punk bowed to Flair and Flair told him to get up and they hugged. Smackdown opened with Edge, Ryder & Hawkins out.

Edge

credited himself for setting up Mysterio's injury and then said he would

end Undertaker's Wrestlemania winning streak. The lights went out and Undertaker showed up in the ring and bounced around Hawkins and Ryder while Edge ran off without being touched. Benjamin pinned Yang in a

Money

in the Bank qualifier. Benjamin used his jumping face plant. Good match and the crowd got into it near the finish. Maryse went to talk with

Teddy

Long in private. Jesse & Festus beat Deuce & Domino for the 50th time. Jesse took a stiff kick and ended up bleeding from the nose. V pinned Moore. Went long and dragged live. MVP did a promo just for the house saying Batista's win over him last week was a fluke. Batista pinned MVP again after three spinebusters and a Batista bomb. Boxer Erik Morales

was

shown at ringside. Morales is the son-in-law of long-time Tijuana promoter and former wrestling magazine publisher Benjamin Mora. Kane pinned Khali. Kane was caught in the head squeeze but kicked off the turnbuckles and landed on top of Khali for the pin. Khali broke the hold

when the bell rang acting like he thought he had won. Reports were it was

a bad match. Palumbo pinned Matt Jackson with the full throttle.

Palumbo

was pushed like an old-time heel squashing his foe and picking him up at

two several times. Mysterio did a promo and talked about his biceps tear

and said he would be having surgery over the weekend (he couldn't say on

Friday with the show airing on Friday). He said he wouldn't be able to wrestle at Mania but was thankful his last appearance would be in San Diego. Vickie Guerrero returned and said she would make him pay for hurting her last week, and ordered him to face Chavo in a non-title match. Mysterio and Vickie got bigger reactions than anyone on the show.

Mysterio did most of his stuff, but after doing a 619, started selling that his arm was hurting. Guerrero used the three amigos, but missed a frog splash and Mysterio cradled him for the pin. Vickie said that Rey wasn't getting off that easy, and Show came out and destroyed Mysterio,

working on his arm and leaving him laying with a choke slam. Even if Mysterio hadn't have been injured, no doubt this would happen because they always destroy him in San Diego. When it was over, Show got on the mic and said this is what Mayweather will have coming to him at Mania. Dark match saw Undertaker & Kane & Batista beat Edge & Hawkins & Ryder to send the people home happy in about 10:00. Edge kept avoiding being in with Undertaker until the finish where Undertaker pinned Edge after a tombstone. . . The Raw Greatest Hits CD fell to No. 129 this week and No. 164 next week. . . Black Pain, the former Universal champion in WWC, will spend the week starting 2/25 in Florida Championship Wrestling as a tryout and in an attempt to get a developmental contract. . . The Smackdown tour runs a New Zealand tour with show on 6/11 in Auckland and 6/12 in Christchurch. . . They are coming out with a new entrance music CD on 3/25, so expect some new entrance tracks in the next few weeks. The biggest change would be the reports of a new track for Vince after doing that "No chance" for nine years. Not sure, because the new Hardy and Kennedy music were already on TV this week while Vince still had the same song. . . Wrestling and MMA titles in the ten best selling sports DVDs in

the 2/23 Billboard charts: 1. Best of Raw 15th anniversary (seven straight weeks on top); 2. UFC 76 Liddell vs. Jardine; 3. UFC 77 Anderson Silva vs. Franklin; 4. WWE Armageddon; 6. UFC 74 Couture vs. Gonzaga; 7. The Shawn Michaels Story; 8. John Cena: My Life; 9. WWE Survivor Series.

. . A lot of the wrestlers who were in OVW and not under WWE contract are said to be thrilled about the split. Lots more have contacted OVW about coming back. There were a lot of people who had worked there who at one time were under contract and liked it, but once cut felt like second class citizens. With no WWE affiliation, Jim Cornette at least was spoken with about coming back and trying to revive it. He opted against it, thinking so much damage had been done the past few years it would be swimming upstream. He made a comment that it would take years of hard work and at 46, he was content with his life and that he didn't think or worry at all about wrestling other than hoping he performed well in his few dates of working each month for TNA. . . Ted DiBiase Jr., 25, was arrested on a DUI after getting in an auto accident at 3:30 a.m. on the morning of 2/15 in Tampa, the morning of the big FCW fair show. DiBiase was in a Cadillac sports utility van that crashed into another car. Nobody was seriously injured. Police came and found DiBiase Jr. slurring

his speech and believed he smelled of alcohol, and he measured 0.14 in

a

breath sobriety test, nearly double the 0.08 legal limit. He was

released

on \$500 bond. . . No update on the status of Apolo. He was sentenced to

a

detour program on a domestic violence charge and never showed up, so

he's

considered a fugitive in Puerto Rico. . .Black Pain, who was a former

Universal champion in WWC, will be in FCW for a week starting 2/25 for

a

tryout looking for a developmental deal. As noted, with South America

being a major target market, they are looking to add people who can

speak

Spanish. . . Cena is in a new Subway commercial that debuted at the

Daytona 500 since it includes Tony Stewart. He's among a bunch of

people

who have done commercials who show up to congratulate Jared on keeping

his weight off for so many years. In the Cena Gillette commercial,

skinny

independent wrestler B.K. Jordan (the guy who came out on Raw several

weeks back as Hornswoggle's tag team partner before Foley came out)

played the role as a race car driver who was beating up Cena. . .

Florida

Championship Wrestling ran its biggest show to date on 2/15 at the

Florida state fair in Tampa. Among the gimmicks are Johnny Curtis &

Kevin

Kiley as a tag team called The Thoroughbreds. Mighty Mikey, who I

presume

is Mike Mondo, is billed as coming from Mikecropolis. Chris Hovan, a

defensive end with the Tampa Bay Bucs, was a guest referee in a Battle

Royal to determine the two men who would battle for the newly created

Florida heavyweight title (the same name as the major belt during the

heyday of the Championship Wrestling from Florida promotion which this

is

an attempt to duplicate to a small degree although nobody fools

themselves into thinking it can ever be close to what that promotion

was

as simply developmental), which ended up coming down to Jake Hager and

Ted DiBiase Jr. They used the women in developmental (recent signees

Taryn Terrell of the Diva Search, Playboy model Beverly Mullins,

British

Columbia Lions cheerleader Angela Fong, Eve Torres of Smackdown, Nattie

Neidhart, Maryse (who I can't believe has never gotten a bigger role on

television) and The Bella Twins. The Twins were about to win when

Neidhart complained about them wearing pink and black, saying those

where

her father and uncles colors and a big brawl took place. Morrison & Miz

beat Heath Miller & Steve Lewington to keep the tag titles. Even though

Miller & Lewington are faces, the crowd went nuts for Morrison & Miz,

seeing them as real stars. It ended with Eddie Colon & Eric Perez

getting

involved and give the local tag teams a feud to come off of, and

Morrison

pinned Miller after a belt shot. Hager pinned DiBiase Jr. to win the title and was given the belt by Dusty Rhodes, who held the old Florida title on numerous occasions. . . 2/13 Raw in Honolulu drew 6,000 fans.

2/13 and 2/14 Smackdown in Santiago, Chile both drew sellouts of 12,500

fans. 2/15 Raw in Fresno drew 8,000. 2/16 Raw in Los Angeles drew

13,000

fans paying \$500,000, which was two-thirds full at the Staples Center

but

that's a great gate for a house show, particularly with Anaheim having

Raw TV two days later. The company is legitimately hot right now at

least

when it comes to the house shows, even in North America. . . .Some

notes

from the 2/12 show in Quito, Ecuador. Kingston pinned Benjamin with his

enzuigiri finisher. Batista & Finlay beat Hawkins & Ryder, which had

the

unique site of Batista dancing with Hornswoggle after the match.

Batista

did a local interview and noted the altitude bothered him a little.

Quito

is got much higher altitude than Denver, so it was likely to bother

anyone working a fast face. Guerrero beat Punk to keep the ECW title.

Main event was Undertaker & Kane & Mysterio over V & MVP & Edge when

Mysterio pinned Edge with a 619. First time ever in the country and a

super hot crowd as you'd figure. . . From the first night in Santiago, Chile, V squashed Noble to open the show. MVP pinned Finlay in a U.S. title match. Mysterio & Kane beat the Edgeheads in the match Mysterio was injured in. Guerrero won a three-way to keep the ECW title over Punk and Benjamin. Batista pinned Henry in what was essentially a slow power match. Main event was different for a house show as they gave the people the currently planned Mania main event of Edge vs. Undertaker. Hawkins & Ryder came down first but only interfered behind the refs back. Mysterio came out to make the save (this was after he was injured) and hit Edge with a belt shot, but the ref saw it and called for the DQ. We think. Other reports have the bell ringing before the belt shot, and thus they figured it was Undertaker who won via DQ. Once again a super hot crowd who loved everything. . . Considering how infrequently WWE goes to Hawaii and that wrestling has a strong history on the island, I would have expected a sellout. The show was the basic fare, with DX over Regal & Umaga on top and Orton pinning Jericho in the title match, plus Hardy over Carlito for the IC belt and Flair beat Kennedy. . . The second show in Santiago, Chile with no Mysterio was headlined by Edge pinning Batista

with the same house show match they were doing for the last several weeks, with the walk out and Teddy Long ordering Edge back in or he loses

the title. Edge used a belt shot when Hawkins & Ryder distracted the ref

to win. They were all leaving when Undertaker came out and chased them back in the ring and Undertaker & Batista laid all three out to end the show. They did announce Mysterio not being there in English, and once again, because the crowd knew no English, nobody knew what they were saying. There was a loud chant for Mysterio by kids at the end of the show because they didn't understand he was injured. Undertaker pinned Henry and laid out Henry, V and Striker all with a choke slam. Guerrero beat Punk clean with a frog splash. Finlay & Noble beat Hawkins & Ryder.

Lots of the babyfaces both nights after winning would hold up Chilean flags. MVP got over good because he knows Spanish and his promo in that language. He also talked about his good friend who was a soccer player and the people cheered, but then he said his friend was a famous player on the rival national team from Argentina. . . Fresno was headlined by HHH pinning Umaga with a pedigree in a cage match and Orton over Hardy with an RKO. Both were good matches, as was most of the show. Flair beat

Kennedy with both doing mic work before the match. A surprise in the opener as Crazy won a three-way over Carlito and Kendrick. Since Fresno has a heavy Mexican-American population, and wrestling draws a higher proportion of that demo than any other demo, they were strongly behind

Crazy. . . Los Angeles saw a DX reunion as they beat Umaga & Regal in the main event. The place was filled with DX glow sticks. A lot of comedy including Regal walking around with his pants down for several minutes. Another spot was HHH, Michaels and Umaga having a contest of, after getting, who could spit the most. The idea was to continually spit as much as they could in the general direction of the referee. Jericho beat JBL in a street fight which included a chair, electrical cord, cookie pans, the ring steps and a kendo stick, using a codebreaker on a chair for the pin. Orton kept the title beating Hardy with the RKO. Said to be a decent show but a quiet crowd. Flair beat Kennedy in the opener with the figure four.