

## Getting sold, played and touched by the WWE

Watching WrestleMania 28 on Pay-Per-View last Sunday made me realize how much I was sold on this being a must-see, can't miss event. I fell victim to the once in a lifetime hype that super charged the Rock, Cena throw down, in Miami, home of the millions, and millions of fans that love to chant Rocky and rip off Stallone's legendary creation in the process. The end of an era headline used to sell the Undertaker, Triple H match worked on me so good, I actually cared about the legacy of Triple H for a change.

And the build up to the Chris Jericho, CM Punk face off, fed into my longing for reliving those high flying, Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon years of the WWF when wrestlers like Superfly Jimmy Snuka, Ricky "The Dragon" Steamboat and the always dapper Tito Santana, reigned supreme. You ever notice how Tito Santana's mane of hair never got wrinkled no matter how many times he charged into an opponent off the ropes with his driving, clothesline. Tito Santana's record at WrestleMania was 2 and 9 by the way. That's lame considering his competition, Greg the Hammer Valentine looked out of shape even back then. Mr. Wonderful had that awesome piledriver and the most glittering, star worthy robes and a name that edged out Mr. Perfect. So you know what I take that back. Tito didn't get screwed. He held on to the Intercontinental Championship Belt for a long time when belt changes in the WWF were about as common as Elizabeth caught not wearing any makeup.

Just like Alec Baldwin says in Glengarry Ross, the WWE is always closing. Critics bash the WWE for now becoming more about smack talk than actual wrestling. But how else do you expect the fans to get consumed into the ongoing drama leading up to WrestleMania? The typical tough guy, scared guy, weasel guy posturing and signature match ending moves offer little surprise on weekly television airings of Raw and Smackdown. Pay-Per-View time is must see time because that's when feuds are settled, legends are made and when Vince deposits another money load into the bank. That's the way it's always been and always will be; it's Capitalism 101, WWE style.

WWE is always pitching, pushing and packaging its sports entertainment product. It's pretty awe inspiring for anyone that's ever worked in sales or entertainment for a living. It's also quite overwhelming knowing that the WWE machine was back in action on Monday for Monday Night Raw right after the four hour Wrestlemania extravaganza Sunday night. Letting the WWE take a night off after its own Super Bowl event would be a nice touch and allow fans at least one day to soak in what just happened, but that's not how Vince rolls. The show must go on and they don't shut down money making Broadway shows the day after the Tony Awards either. I don't know that for a fact but it sounds like a convincing argument.

Being played with by the WWE is a humiliating feeling, knowing that I wasn't any different from the millions of teenage wrestling fans that got tricked into thinking for a fleeting moment that Shawn Michaels Sweet Chin Music was going to end the dead man's undefeated streak at WrestleMania. I beat myself up over how gullible I felt all night. Logically, there was no way the Undertaker was going to lose this match. The guy is immortal for Christ sake. He's never lost at WrestleMania. He's outlasted all the other scary, haunted characters like Mike Meyers without the mask. Yet all of a sudden, he's going to lose to Triple H because the ex-Playgirl Centerfold bails him out with a stiff kick to the chin. Like that's going to be the difference maker in the match after the Undertaker got crushed with a sledgehammer for what felt like the entire duration of the Peter Gabriel video twelve times in a row. Yes, we all thought that the Shawn Michaels kick would be that difference maker in the end. Joining forces with Triple H was the only way to end the winning streak. And what better pair of wrestling buds to pull it off we thought.

When Shawn Michaels dropped the Undertaker with the swift, elongated chin kick that reached for the heavens, my heart jumped out its chest and came slinging straight back up like it just went bungee jumping without expecting it. You can't beat this level of high drama anywhere, not even on Broadway. If you were a fan of the WWF as a kid, you can't help but be emotionally invested in this type of high stakes, modern living folklore.

The Undertaker is a role of a lifetime and he's milked it for everything its worth. My generation has such deep rooted connections to this type of entertainment. Are ties to characters like the Undertaker have been in place for some time and are impossible to replicate. Tony Soprano had a run that was Big Boss Man long but that's it. If Don Draper choked on his puke while passed out on his desk, I wouldn't be bothered by it, is all I'm saying.

Everything after the Triple H, Undertaker match was anti-climatic. I didn't care if CM Punk closed the casket on Chris Jericho's career for good. Chris Jericho is a successful, rock star that has had a better second act than 99% of all professional wrestlers once they left the wrestling business. So how much empathy is Jericho going to drum up exactly? It was exciting to see to CM Punk and Jericho face off knowing that they became marital artists and hot shot tamales from their fighting days in Japan and Mexico during their formative, wrestling years. The alcoholic dad insults that were supposed to make CM Punk lose his cool so he'd get disqualified was unnecessary knowing that their mere athleticism and wrestling talent alone would make the fight legendary as is. Making references to CM Punk's alcoholic dad was so cheesy, it made Virgil's sleeveless white tuxedo blush.

Rock beating Cena didn't pack an emotional wallop because Cena is new school, a tad clunky and doesn't stimulate the imagination the way old school living legends do. Plus, the Rock always wins at everything and I was much more interested in what he had to say about being victorious instead.

After Triple H got pinned, Shawn Michaels, the guest referee and best friend of Triple H along with the dreaded Undertaker picked him off the mat and walked him out the ring with his arms draped around their shoulders looking like a swelled up Jesus post crucifixion.

Helping Triple H out of the ring with his dead arms flung over Shawn Michaels and the Undertaker was such a natural expression of manly brotherhood that was as real as it gets. But the most heart pulsating moment of the night was when the Undertaker, Shawn Michaels and Triple H held each other close for a collective embrace as the crowd stood on their feet, showering them with love for giving them the most heart splattering send off imaginable. You couldn't help but feel a surge in pride and renewed respect for such a classy gesture from legendary wrestling royalty.

There's only been 17 Hell in the Cell Matches and I think Triple H and Undertaker killed each other in eighty percent of them. I don't see Daniel Bryan, Cody Rhodes or any other of the new age, small men, absorbing that level of punishment without being shattered to pieces on the spot. This match really was the end of an era and better than advertised. How rare is that?

Steamboat versus Macho Man, Hogan versus Rock, Hogan versus Andre were all electrifying WrestleMania matches that were flush with emotional peaks. But none of those events came close to touching me the way this band of brothers embrace did. It was a privilege to be a part of this living legends tribute as they made their last gut spilling charge toward wrestling immortality. Tito Santana's hair from the nineties never knew perfection like this.

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