

A NEW ERA IN THE WWE

Wrestling VS Storylines



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When Shane McMahon returned to WWE programming earlier this year, he said he would be ushering in a new era in the WWE. Frankly, this is something fans have been feeling for a long time even before Shane said it. Anyone who has been following WWE for the past five or so years can see the ghosts of the Attitude Era have been completely shelved. There's none of that violence or edginess left. The focus is now on athleticism and in many ways wrestling has gone back to the 'purist' days.

Most of us became wrestling fans when the screen was filled with DX, The Rock, Austin, Mankind and co. Although they pretended to be 'sportsmen' competing in a 'sport', Monday Night Raw was one of the best 'TV Shows' around. Everything they did was cool or funny or shocking. They also *happened* to be wrestlers. That is not to say they couldn't put on a show in the ring but the wrestling was never at the heart of it. After all, few remember DX for their in ring performances.

This is in stark contrast to the WWE of today. Most of the leading performers are 'indie darlings' who performed in the independent circuits before they came to the WWE. Indie has very little room for drama and is all about in-ring technicians. And that shows as stars like Sami Zayn, Cesaro and the likes have an incredible move set and could frankly run rings around their Attitude Era counterparts in terms of manoeuvres. But what about the characters?

And this is where the great debate comes in. What's more important to wrestling? The wrestling or the 'plot' and the 'characters'? Let's be honest, the greatest moments in wrestling history were never about the 'athleticism'.

My personal favourites include Jeff Hardy's crazy Swanton Bomb off a 20 foot ladder onto CM Punk and Mankind winning his first WWF title. Not to mention, the insane dive Jeff took doesn't require athleticism but it's not the same breed of athleticism as Cesaro and his 75 move repertoire. It was more about him just being crazy. And as for the Mankind moment, it was all about the storytelling. Mick Foley's alter ego was painted as an underdog who would never be able to cut it. He was insane, not talented and completely out of his depth. But he won. The man defied everything and won. And everyone likes a well-executed underdog story.

The stories were also essential to the biggest starts of

the Attitude Era; Stone Cold Steve Austin and The Rock. Neither man was a master technician. For example, The Rock's finishing moves, The Rock Bottom and The People's Elbow, are as simple as finishing moves get. But it was The Rock's charisma that made The People's Elbow something that made it 'electric'. Do current day stars have that? Honestly, no.

At the time of writing, Roman Reigns is the WWE World Heavyweight champion and is being marketed as the next 'face' of the company. He is a hard working guy who wants to support his family. That would've been interesting if it wasn't for the fact that almost every individual tries hard at their job and wants to provide for their family. What makes him a star? He's not an Indie Darling and has a very limited move set. He is generally pushed because of Vince McMahon's fascination for performers who 'look' the part. Pretty much anyone who hits Roman is cheered although he's a 'good guy' plot wise. Great storytelling, WWE.

The others around Roman lack personality in many ways. Sami Zayn is a great performer but his only gimmick is that he was betrayed by Kevin Owens. The greatest example of this phenomenon is Apollo Crews. Crews is built like a tank and has a wonderful move set. But that's about it. Who is Apollo Crews? Why would you want him/not want him to win?

Many fans argue that that the athletic excellence on display is worth watching and I will admit there is some joy in Cesaro or Zayn flying but will you really get behind them and want them to win a match like you wanted Daniel Bryan to win back at WrestleMania 30? Bryan was an indie darling too but it was his story as the looked-down-upon 'little man' that pushed him to new heights.

Wrestling has become a storytelling platform. If there is a story to be told in the ring then the wrestlers themselves need to be fleshed out, well written characters. It's why the Attitude Era stars became this beloved despite having very limited wrestling ability. Go back to the storyboard, WWE. Moves are great but I need a reason to 'care' about Apollo Crews other than the fact he can move fast. I could always just watch gymnastics for that.

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