

FIGURE FOUR WEEKLY~!

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WWE 2K15 Review—sort of

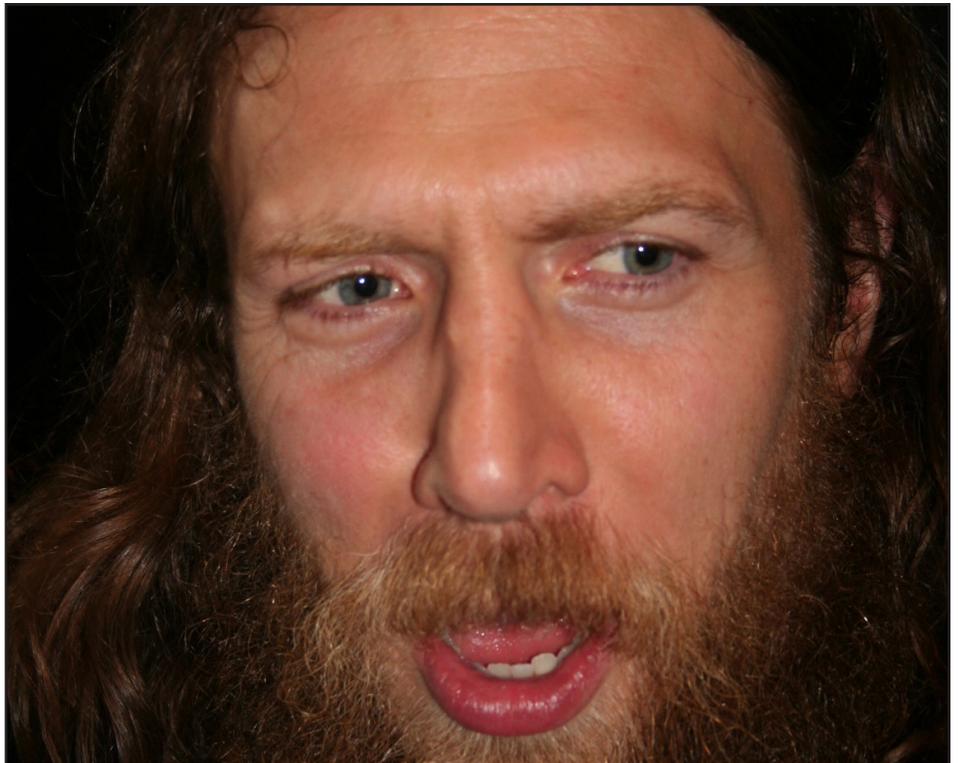
by David Bixenspan (@davidbix)

It's forgotten now, but the first game in the series that turned into WWE 2K, the first SmackDown game for the original Sony PlayStation console, was considered something of a disappointment among the hardcore fanbase. THQ had taken over the WWF license from Acclaim, and while their games for the Nintendo 64 console would serve as a continuation of their beloved WCW games, the PlayStation series would be something different. When Japanese developer Yuke's was announced as being in charge, fans rejoiced; they held the license for New Japan Pro Wrestling and had made several quality titles.

When SmackDown came out, something was clearly off about the game. It had some superficial similarities to the Toukon Retsuden (essentially "Fighting Spirit") series of New Japan games (one of which had been released in the west as Power Move Pro Wrestling), but it felt...off. That's because for whatever reason, Yuke's didn't use Toukon Retsuden as the basis for SmackDown. Instead, it was based on their entry in the "Simple 1500 Series," a string of budget titles that encompassed generic, simplified versions of various pro wrestling genres designed for beginners. Yes, SmackDown was literally a dumbed down version of the New Japan games.

With the release of WWE 2K15 this past week, we're now three console generations and almost 15 years later. While this is the second game in the WWE 2K series (WWE 2K14 was partially developed at THQ before they filed bankruptcy and sold the license to 2K), it was promoted as the first one where Visual Concepts (Take Two Interactive's in-house sports game developer for the "2K" series) would be working closely with Yuke's. It's also the first WWE game for the newest generation of game consoles, the Sony PlayStation 4 and Microsoft Xbox One.

In theory, this was supposed to be the end of everything that has been blamed on THQ. After all, before getting AKI to develop games for the WCW license, they were best known for making a slew of disappointing to awful games based on a wide variety of movie and TV show licenses. Maybe they took over too much while the company was in dire financial straits, and that's why



Daniel Bryan is in WWE 2K15—which doesn't mean it's a good game. PHOTO: Mike Lano

the WWE games were so stagnant, with graphics way behind current standards, glitch-heavy games, and so on. Visual Concepts would be stepping in, keeping Yuke's in line, and also providing awesome graphics in line with the NBA 2K series, the current best-looking sports series. THQ never even DESERVED the WWE license, am I right? No wonder they initially got it by partnering with a company, Jakks Pacific, that got their WWE deal via illegal kickbacks.

In practice? WWE 2K15 for the PlayStation 4 is shockingly bad. A number of match options, features, etc., were removed, including most of the hugely popular creation suite (create an arena, create a finisher, etc.), with only wrestler and entrance creation tools remaining. Various move slots were removed, giving less variety to matches, to the point that at times, the matches almost feel like the least fun part of the game,

if that makes any sense. That isn't necessarily new for this series, but it feels more pronounced than usual.

As for the graphics, I'll be blunt: What the FUCK happened here? A handful of top guys look much improved. Everyone else, especially people with long hair, looks terrible. This is easily the worst looking game of the new console generation. The female character models look WRONG, and their hair, which resembles the hair a child would sculpt in a Play-Doh sculpture, looks two to three console generations old. AJ Lee's hair is something to behold, while Summer Rae might have gotten the worst of it, in that her face, neck, and jaw are attached in a way that doesn't resemble human anatomy, making her dancing ring entrance completely horrifying. Even short hair doesn't make it out unscathed, as a number of blonde male wrestlers, including William Regal,

have jet black hair. I'm not sure I can even comprehend how you screw that up.

And it's not just the character models: The animation quality, which was always lacking, is worse than ever. Some of it may be the byproduct of recycling old animations. When someone on our message board posted a video of the first SmackDown game, I noticed a number of identical animations to what's in the game now, even though it's 15 years and three console generations later. There has always been speculation that they have always used the same basic game engine, but that's easier to believe than ever before, just because the whole game looks so dated.

As much as WWE, the wrestlers who rely on the royalty checks, and some fans would hate it, they need to take next year off and go back to the drawing board. Even if the gameplay didn't suffer, they just can't make a game that looks like this for the current generation consoles. If they ever have a prayer of getting non-fans to play these games (that may sound silly, but the WCW and WWF games for the Nintendo 64 were so well received

and won enough awards that non-wrestling fans were playing them), that's something they need to fix. Considering how much better EA Sports UFC looks for a similar game, it's certainly doable.

Initial Thoughts on Wrestling Observer Hall of Fame 2014 Results

by David Bixenspan (@davidbix)

The good news: The Rock & Roll Express got in! Fabulous Moolah is off the ballot...for now.

The bad news: Nobody else got voted in and a lot of the results are really weird, with the votes really spread out.

Before we go any further, this was my ballot:

Modern US: Junkyard Dog (who got 16% of the actual vote), Ivan Koloff (48%), Dick Murdoch (45%), Rock & Roll Express (64%).

Mexico: Brazo de Oro & Brazo de Plata & El Brazo (16%), Cien Caras (54%), Karloff Lagarde (48%), El Signo & El Texano & Negro Navarro (36%).

Australia/Pacific Islands/Puerto Rico: Carlos Colon (56%), Mark Lewin (38%).

Non-Wrestlers: Dave Brown (13%), Jimmy Hart (36%), Jerry Jarrett (44%), Gene Okerlund (36%), Don Owen (30%).

US Historical, Japan, & Europe: ABSTAIN.

I'm honestly not sure what to think of some of the results. Perhaps thanks to the new rule requiring a 50 percent election to stay on the ballot, votes were fairly spread out, and while it helped the Rock & Roll Express get in and gave Cien Caras a healthy bump (he has increased noticeably every year since returning to the ballot), Dick Murdoch was actually down a percentage point. As a result, he's gone until 2024, when he becomes a historical candidate.

Caras, Lagarde, and Los Misioneros de la Muerte were actually No. 1, 2, and 3 as far as Mexico went in spite of the percentage disparity. It's entirely possible that with Caras being the only Mexican candidate at risk, a decent amount of voters voted ONLY for him to try to save him, and it skewed the results for the entire region. Even with a strong showing, Lagarde was down four percent. Villano III (who gets added to the chopping block next year) was down eight percent, Blue Panther was down 13 percent, LA Park was down a whopping 22 percent (from 46 percent last year), Dr. Wagner Jr. was down 11 percent, Hector Garza was down 17 percent (!), and even Vampiro was down 5 percent (think about how loyal his voters must be). Huracan Ramirez was one of the few to gain, picking up eight percent over last year. New candidate Ultimo Guerrero, considered something of a favorite because of how much

of an increase (more than 20 percent) got dance partner Atlantis in last year, only managed two percent. It's hard to look at that and think that there wasn't a huge number of Caras-only voters.

If this is what the new rule is going to do going forward, I have to say I'm not a fan. While I'm sure the results will be different in subsequent years, Caras was the only candidate at risk in a region with a relatively small pool of voters. I'm glad that he got the support to stay on the ballot, but even with the huge imbalance, it still wasn't enough for him to get in, and it quite possibly kept a slam dunk act (Misioneros de la Muerte) from coming even close. It's nice to see someone like Caras get that kind of enthusiasm, but who are these people who think Cien Caras is a HOFer but didn't vote for any other Mexican candidates?

Junkyard Dog's low numbers were pretty shocking, as it seemed like he had a lot of support to get him on the ballot and it feels like we're past the "LOL Junkfood Dog" way of thinking about him. The rest are kind of disappointing to me but not necessarily shocking. Cien Caras, Carlos Colon, Villano III, and Volk Han are the only ones on the chopping block next year, so the modern US category won't be affected, but Mexico and to a lesser extent Japan could still have issues.

As for people I didn't vote for: FABULOUS MOOLAH IS GONE! But she's back in 2017 as a historical candidate because that marks 30 years since her "last year as a significant star and major player." She does by far her best numbers among former wrestlers (where she came in sixth place) and active wrestlers (where she came in 23rd place). Well, that makes sense for a number of reasons, some of which are especially unsavory.

Mexico Notes

by Dr. Lucha Steve Sims (@DrLuchaJr)

One of the inherent problems in writing a column is that not everything happens in neat, pre-determined intervals. Often, the big news in the ring happens at the appointed date and hour, sometimes it doesn't, and sometimes it happens right after column submission and just before newsletter publication. Such was the case this past week. In last week's issue, I had noted that Rush had hurt his ankle pretty significantly. Well, not exactly but close enough, as he suffered a broken lower leg and will be out for a while (current estimate going around the horn is three months or so, so he'll miss the Fantastica-Mania shows in January in Japan). This led me to speculate whether CMLL would bother running a year-end show main-event cage match they had been setting up. Well, day after press day, CMLL released a video announcing the match anyway. The show, "Infierno en el Ring," will take place at Arena Mexico on December 5. They transition to smaller cards for a few weeks. It looks to be a ten-man cage match with Ultimo Guerrero the favorite to be the "winner" (one of the last two left in the cage and then getting the pinfall on the man getting

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