

Road to the Throne: 08.07.2026

Promotion: United Toughness Alliance
Date: August 7, 2026
Location: Xfinity Mobile Arena — Philadelphia, PA

Preview

The Road to the Throne begins here as the United Toughness Alliance returns to the United States and prepares the journey to crown the 2026 Ring King. All matches will be qualifying matches for the 2026 Ring King tournament.

Results

Introduction

Segment

The screen is black.

For several seconds, there is nothing.

Then comes the sound of a ticking clock.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

A single spotlight illuminates an empty throne sitting in the darkness.

A deep voice cuts through the silence.

"Six already have their place."

Chris Ross raises the UTA Championship.

Hakuryu stands over Yoshii, the United States Championship in his possession.

Bobby Dean clutches the International Championship.

Mikey Unlikely holds the WrestleZone Championship high.

Samuel Scythe stands beside Ace Andrews with the Fighting Championship around his waist.

Emily Hightower stares into the camera with championship gold over her shoulder.

"Ten more must earn theirs."

The music begins to build.

Rapid cuts flash across the screen.

Kirsty McKinny.

Valentina Blaze.

Trey Mack.

Bianca Page.

Clovis Black.

Lindsey Lothario.

Valkyrie Knoxx.

Mike Best.

Maxwell Jett.

Kairo Bey.

Each face appears for only a fraction of a second before disappearing into darkness.

"There are no second chances."

The empty throne appears again.

"There is only the road."

The screen explodes into the UTA logo.

ROAD TO THE THRONE

AUGUST 7, 2026

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

BOOM!

Pyrotechnics erupt across the entrance stage inside Philadelphia's Xfinity Mobile Arena as thousands of fans leap to their feet. The camera sweeps across the building, catching signs, raised fists, replica championships, and fans screaming toward the lens.

The familiar UTA entrance stage glows beneath the Road to the Throne graphics as another burst of pyro fires toward the ceiling.

We cut ringside where John Phillips and Mark Bravo sit behind the commentary desk.

John Phillips: "Ladies and gentlemen, welcome back to the United States! Welcome to Philadelphia! And welcome to the Road to the Throne!"

Mark Bravo: "We've spent months traveling the world, John, but tonight UTA is back on American soil, and everybody in that locker room knows exactly what's at stake."

John Phillips: "September twenty-sixth, sixteen competitors will enter the Ring King tournament. One man or woman will eventually survive that field and be crowned the 2026 Ring King."

Mark Bravo: "Or Queen."

John Phillips: "Absolutely. And six competitors don't have to worry about qualifying. Every current UTA singles champion has been guaranteed entry into the opening round."

The screen displays the six champions.

UTA Champion — Chris Ross

United States Champion — Hakuryu

International Champion — Bobby Dean

WrestleZone Champion — Mikey Unlikely

Fighting Champion — Samuel Scythe

Women's Champion — Emily Hightower

John Phillips: "Those six are in. Tonight, five more names join them."

Mark Bravo: "Which means half the people competing tonight are going home knowing their Road to the Throne ended before they ever reached the tournament."

John Phillips: "And what a night of qualifying matches we have ahead of us."

The graphics change to Kirsty McKinny and Valentina Blaze.

John Phillips: "Kirsty McKinny meets Valentina Blaze."

Mark Bravo: "Two women with a tremendous opportunity. Kirsty has been trying to establish herself since arriving in UTA, while Valentina Blaze has spent plenty of time around the championship picture. Tonight isn't about where they've been. It's about whether they're moving forward."

The graphic changes.

TREY MACK vs. BIANCA PAGE

John Phillips: "Then Trey Mack faces Bianca Page."

Mark Bravo: "And there's a whole lot wrapped up in this one. Trey Mack representing The Empire. Bianca Page representing the Platinum Society. Two people who have spent plenty of time near the top of these rankings, and only one gets into Ring King."

John Phillips: "Bianca Page has made no secret of the fact that she and the Platinum Society believe they've been overlooked. There is no better way to answer that complaint than winning tonight."

Mark Bravo: "Ace Andrews wants opportunities? Here's one. Bianca just has to take it."

Another graphic.

CLOVIS BLACK vs. LINDSEY LOTHARIO

John Phillips: "Clovis Black takes on Lindsey Lothario."

Mark Bravo: "The Empire against The Creed Method. Lindsey came incredibly close to leaving Toronto as International Champion before everything involving Eric Dane Junior exploded around that match. Tonight she gets another chance to put herself in position for something even bigger."

John Phillips: "But Clovis Black has never been someone I'd recommend overlooking."

Mark Bravo: "Not unless you've got a really good dental plan."

The screen changes again.

VALKYRIE KNOXX vs. MIKE BEST

The Philadelphia crowd immediately reacts at the sight of Mike Best.

John Phillips: "Valkyrie Knox of The Empire faces Mike Best."

Mark Bravo: "Mike Best came to UTA for one reason: championships. He got his opportunity at One Last Stop, and he didn't leave Toronto with the UTA Championship."

John Phillips: "Chris Ross did."

Mark Bravo: "Exactly. And I don't imagine Mike Best has spent the last two weeks peacefully accepting that."

John Phillips: "But Valkyrie Knoxx has an enormous opportunity of her own. Beating Mike Best to qualify for Ring King would immediately become one of the biggest victories of her UTA career."

Finally, the main event graphic fills the screen.

MAXWELL JETT vs. KAIRO BEY

John Phillips: "And in our main event, former UTA Champion Maxwell Jett faces The Creed Method's Kairo Bey."

Mark Bravo: "That's the one I'm watching."

John Phillips: "At One Last Stop, Maxwell Jett entered Toronto as UTA Champion. He left without the championship after Chris Ross pinned him in the Triple Threat Match."

Mark Bravo: "And Maxwell Jett doesn't handle losing particularly well."

John Phillips: "That's putting it mildly."

Mark Bravo: "The championship is gone. Now Maxwell has a choice. He can sit around complaining about what happened in Toronto, or he can beat Kairo Bey tonight, enter Ring King, and start climbing right back toward the top."

John Phillips: "And Kairo Bey would love nothing more than to make sure that climb ends before it begins."

The camera pulls away from the commentary desk and sweeps across the capacity crowd once again.

John Phillips: "Ten competitors."

Mark Bravo: "Five matches."

John Phillips: "Five places in the 2026 Ring King tournament."

Mark Bravo: "Win and you're one step closer to the throne."

John Phillips: "Lose..."

Mark Bravo: "...and somebody else takes your seat."

The Road to the Throne logo flashes across the screen as the Philadelphia crowd roars.

John Phillips: "The Road to Ring King begins right now!"

Kirsty McKinny vs. Valentina Blaze

Match

The Road to the Throne graphic disappears from the screen, returning us to a wide shot of the Xfinity Mobile Arena.

The Philadelphia crowd remains on its feet, still buzzing from the opening of the show.

John Phillips: "And there is no waiting around tonight. Five matches. Five spots in the Ring King tournament. We're starting right now."

Mark Bravo: "That's what I like about this, John. You don't need a complicated explanation. You win, you're in. You lose, you're watching Ring King from the sidelines."

The lights throughout the arena suddenly begin shifting to a fiery orange.

A low rumbling bass begins to build through the Xfinity Mobile Arena.

The sound grows louder.

And louder.

Until—

"Firestarter" by The Prodigy blasts through the arena speakers!

The Philadelphia crowd erupts as Valentina Blaze bursts through the curtain.

John Phillips: "Here comes The Inferno!"

Valentina stops at the top of the entranceway, taking in the crowd for a moment before extending one hand in front of her.

Her finger traces an imaginary spark through the air.

Then she throws up the familiar gesture.

Valentina Blaze: "LIGHT IT UP!"

The response from Philadelphia is immediate.

Valentina breaks into a sprint down the entranceway toward the ring.

John Phillips: "Valentina Blaze has been through quite the journey in UTA, Mark, and now she has an opportunity to put herself into the biggest tournament of the year."

Mark Bravo: "And don't forget who she's been standing beside through a lot of this year. Chris Ross doesn't have to qualify. He's the UTA Champion, so his ticket to Ring King is already punched."

Valentina reaches ringside and quickly hops onto the apron.

John Phillips: "But Valentina Blaze does have to qualify."

Mark Bravo: "Exactly. Ross can't help her here. Nobody can. If Valentina wants to be standing in that tournament alongside the UTA Champion, she's gotta earn it herself."

Valentina grabs the top rope and slingshots herself over, landing on her feet inside the ring.

She immediately takes off toward the opposite side, hitting the ropes and racing back before jumping onto the middle rope and throwing one arm into the air.

Another roar rises from the crowd.

John Phillips: "And you know she'd love nothing more."

Mark Bravo: "There's something else to think about, too. The winner of Ring King is guaranteed a UTA Championship opportunity."

John Phillips: "Unless Chris Ross himself wins the tournament."

Mark Bravo: "Right. So imagine Valentina Blaze wins this thing. Imagine she survives fifteen other competitors and becomes the Ring Queen. You know who could be waiting at the end of that road."

Valentina drops back to the canvas and begins bouncing lightly on the balls of her feet.

John Phillips: "That's September. Valentina can't afford to think that far ahead."

Mark Bravo: "Because Kirsty McKinney will tie her into a human pretzel if she does."

Valentina rolls her shoulders and backs into her corner.

The excitement begins to fade from her expression.

Her eyes turn toward the entranceway.

Focused now.

Ready.

John Phillips: "Valentina Blaze brings speed, kicks, and absolutely no fear into this match. But she's about to face a woman whose entire life has been built around putting people on the mat and keeping them there."

Mark Bravo: "And that's what makes this such a great first qualifier. Valentina Blaze wants to light it up."

Valentina crouches slightly in her corner, eyes locked on the stage.

Mark Bravo: "Kirsty McKinney wants to turn the fire off."

Valentina Blaze remains loose in her corner, bouncing lightly from one foot to the other as she watches the entranceway.

The fiery orange lighting fades.

Then the opening of "In Walks Barbarella" by Clutch growls through the Xfinity Mobile Arena.

There is no explosion of pyro.

No dramatic lighting cue.

No grand introduction from Kirsty McKinney.

She simply walks through the curtain.

John Phillips: "And here comes Kirsty McKinney."

Kirsty's expression is almost completely neutral as she starts down the entranceway. Her eyes briefly move across the Philadelphia crowd, but there is little acknowledgment beyond the occasional sideways glance.

Mark Bravo: "Look at her, John. Everybody else sees Ring King. The throne. The championship opportunity. One of the biggest tournaments UTA has ever put together."

A fan leaning over the barricade shouts something toward Kirsty.

She turns her head.

Stares at him.

Rolls her eyes.

And continues walking.

Mark Bravo: "Kirsty looks like somebody told her she has to stop at the grocery store on the way home."

John Phillips: "That's Kirsty McKinney. Don't mistake the demeanor for a lack of ambition. McKinney has been very clear since arriving in UTA about what she thinks of her own abilities."

Mark Bravo: "She's also been pretty clear about what she thinks of everybody else's."

Kirsty gets closer to the ring and finally picks up her pace, transitioning from the walk into a jog.

John Phillips: "A lifetime amateur wrestling record of one hundred fifty-one victories and only one defeat. McKinney was once considered destined for the Olympic podium before the physical toll of making weight ultimately ended that dream."

Mark Bravo: "And that's what makes Ring King interesting for her. She never got those five rings she wanted, but now she's got another tournament sitting right in front of her."

Kirsty reaches the ring and dives beneath the bottom rope.

She rolls smoothly onto her knees before pushing herself upright.

Valentina watches from across the ring.

Kirsty gives her a brief glance.

Then she drops into a deep squat.

Back up.

Another deep squat.

She rolls one shoulder.

Then the other.

John Phillips: "And stylistically, these two could hardly be more different."

Mark Bravo: "Valentina wants movement. She wants space. She wants to throw those kicks, hit those ropes, get airborne and make Kirsty chase her."

John Phillips: "Kirsty wants exactly the opposite. She wants Valentina on the canvas."

Mark Bravo: "Preferably underneath her."

Kirsty flicks her hair away from her face with that familiar air of annoyance before finally turning her full attention toward Valentina.

John Phillips: "McKinney has already shown us exactly what happens when she can dictate the pace of a singles match."

Mark Bravo: "Remember South Africa. She spent weeks complaining about four-way matches because, according to Kirsty, they're designed to give inferior wrestlers a chance against superior ones."

John Phillips: "Then she got the singles match she wanted against Juno Sage."

Mark Bravo: "And proved her point."

Kirsty backs toward her corner.

Across the ring, Valentina stretches one leg against the ropes before dropping it back to the canvas.

The two women lock eyes.

Valentina is restless. Energetic. Ready to explode the instant the bell rings.

Kirsty barely moves at all.

John Phillips: "Valentina Blaze versus Kirsty McKinney. One of these women will become the seventh official entrant into the 2026 Ring King tournament."

Mark Bravo: "And Kirsty finally has exactly what she's been asking for. No four-way dance. No rumble. Nobody else to blame. One opponent."

The referee moves between them, checking that both competitors are ready.

Valentina nods immediately.

Kirsty gives the referee an impatient little motion with her hand.

Mark Bravo: "Let's find out if she likes singles matches as much as she says she does."

The referee signals toward the timekeeper.

Valentina steps away from her corner.

Kirsty lowers her center of gravity.

The bell is moments away.

DING! DING! DING!

Valentina Blaze immediately begins circling.

Kirsty McKinney doesn't.

She comes straight forward.

John Phillips: "And our first Ring King qualifier is underway!"

Valentina keeps moving laterally, hands raised, trying to keep Kirsty directly in front of her.

Kirsty lowers her level.

Valentina reacts.

McKinney shoots.

Valentina sprawls!

John Phillips: "Blaze was ready for it!"

Kirsty keeps hold of the leg.

Valentina hops backward on one foot as Kirsty tries to pull the other out from beneath her.

Valentina drives a forearm down across Kirsty's upper back.

Another!

Kirsty releases.

Valentina immediately spins—

BACK KICK!

Kirsty takes it across the ribs and stumbles sideways.

Valentina hits the ropes.

Running Bulldog—

NO!

Kirsty catches her around the waist!

Valentina's feet leave the canvas.

McKinney violently dumps her forward onto the mat!

Mark Bravo: "And there's the problem!"

Valentina tries to scramble away.

Kirsty dives onto her back.

One arm snakes around Valentina's waist while Kirsty's knee wedges against the inside of her thigh.

Valentina reaches forward.

Kirsty pulls her backward.

John Phillips: "Look at the control from McKinney."

Mark Bravo: "This is where Kirsty wants her. Don't let the professional wrestling ring fool you. Kirsty McKinney has spent most of her life learning how to make sure another human being cannot move."

Valentina plants both palms against the canvas and tries to push herself upward.

Kirsty immediately shifts her weight.

She hooks an ankle.

Turns her hips.

And twists Valentina back down.

Valentina grimaces.

Kirsty looks almost annoyed that she tried.

John Phillips: "We've talked about a change in Kirsty McKinney recently."

Mark Bravo: "She's angry."

John Phillips: "That's putting it simply."

Kirsty reaches beneath Valentina's chin and pulls backward.

Not quite a choke.

Just enough pressure across the face to make it miserable.

The referee warns her.

Kirsty releases.

For about half a second.

Then drives her forearm across Valentina's cheek and grinds her face into the canvas.

John Phillips: "Come on!"

Mark Bravo: "Technically legal."

John Phillips: "That doesn't make it necessary."

Mark Bravo: "You wanna explain that distinction to Kirsty?"

Valentina manages to get one knee underneath herself.

Kirsty maintains the waistlock.

Valentina gets the other foot planted.

Kirsty tries to drag her backward—

Valentina suddenly reaches down and peels at Kirsty's grip.

She turns!

ELBOW!

Kirsty's head snaps backward.

Another elbow!

The waistlock breaks.

Valentina spins around—

CRACK!

A kick catches Kirsty across the thigh.

Another!

Another!

John Phillips: "There's Valentina Blaze!"

Kirsty reaches for her.

Valentina ducks underneath.

Off the ropes!

TILT-A-WHIRL HEADSCISSORS!

Kirsty goes tumbling across the canvas!

The Philadelphia crowd comes alive.

Kirsty pushes herself up—

DROP-TOE-HOLD!

Kirsty's face bounces off the canvas!

Valentina rolls through.

Kick to the side of the head!

Kirsty collapses onto her side.

John Phillips: "Blaze has found her opening!"

Mark Bravo: "This is exactly what Kirsty cannot allow. Valentina gets moving and suddenly you're trying to catch a bottle rocket."

Valentina grabs Kirsty by the wrist.

Irish whip!

Kirsty hits the ropes.

Valentina leaps—

Kirsty stops herself!

Valentina lands awkwardly after expecting contact.

Kirsty charges—

VALENTINA SIDESTEPS!

Kirsty hits the ropes again.

FLASHPOINT!

The springboard roundhouse catches McKinney flush!

John Phillips: "SHE GOT HER!"

Kirsty drops!

Valentina dives across her!

ONE!

TWO!

KIRSTY KICKS OUT!

John Phillips: "Two!"

Valentina immediately gets back to her feet.

She doesn't argue.

She doesn't hesitate.

She throws the familiar gesture toward the Philadelphia crowd.

Valentina Blaze: "LIGHT IT UP!"

The crowd answers her.

Mark Bravo: "She smells it, John."

Valentina heads toward the ropes.

Kirsty is getting back to her knees.

Valentina springs—

Kirsty suddenly lunges forward!

SHE CATCHES VALENTINA OUT OF THE AIR!

Valentina's momentum carries them both down, but Kirsty immediately rolls through and traps the arm.

John Phillips: "What a counter!"

Valentina tries to turn toward her.

Kirsty threads her leg through Valentina's.

Hooks the ankle.

Grabs the wrist.

Valentina suddenly finds herself twisted onto her stomach.

Kirsty sits across her lower back.

Mark Bravo: "And welcome back to Kirsty's world."

Valentina reaches toward the ropes.

They're too far away.

Kirsty looks down at her.

Then something changes.

She doesn't settle for control.

She yanks backward on Valentina's trapped arm.

HARD.

Valentina cries out.

John Phillips: "McKinney wrenching that shoulder!"

Valentina tries rolling through.

Kirsty anticipates it.

She releases the wrist, slides around Valentina's body and catches her around the waist.

Kirsty stands.

Valentina comes with her.

GERMAN SUPLEX!

Valentina lands hard across her shoulders!

Kirsty doesn't bridge.

She doesn't cover.

She keeps the waistlock.

And pulls Valentina back up.

John Phillips: "Again?!"

Valentina fires an elbow backward.

Kirsty absorbs it.

Another!

Kirsty's grip loosens.

Valentina fires a third—

KIRSTY DRIVES A KNEE INTO HER BACK!

Valentina arches in pain.

Kirsty spins her around.

BELLY-TO-BELLY SUPLEX!

Valentina crashes across the ring!

Mark Bravo: "That's what I'm talking about. The Kirsty McKinney we first saw wanted to prove she could outwrestle you. This Kirsty McKinney looks like she wants you to regret getting booked."

Kirsty gets back to her feet.

She brushes strands of hair away from her face.

Valentina rolls toward the ropes, clutching her back.

Kirsty watches her.

No smile.

No taunt.

Just irritation.

Valentina grabs the middle rope and starts pulling herself upright.

Kirsty charges.

CORKSCREW FOREARM!

VALENTINA MOVES!

Kirsty crashes chest-first into the ropes!

Valentina immediately hooks her from behind—

ROLL-UP!

ONE!

TWO!

KIRSTY ESCAPES!

Both women scramble up.

Kirsty shoots!

Valentina leapfrogs over her!

Kirsty turns—

SPINNING BACK KICK!

RIGHT TO THE CHEST!

Kirsty stumbles backward into the corner!

John Phillips: "Valentina is not going away!"

Valentina charges!

METEORA!

Both knees smash into Kirsty's chest!

McKinney crumples into a seated position.

Valentina backs away.

She looks toward the ropes.

Then toward Kirsty.

The crowd rises again.

John Phillips: "Blaze is building momentum!"

Mark Bravo: "And Kirsty might've underestimated just how difficult Valentina Blaze is to keep down!"

Valentina takes off toward the opposite ropes.

Kirsty begins pulling herself upright in the corner.

Valentina rebounds.

Full speed.

Kirsty looks up.

Valentina is coming straight at her.

Valentina rebounds off the ropes.

Full speed.

Kirsty looks up.

Valentina is coming straight at her.

Kirsty suddenly steps forward—

VALENTINA LEAPS!

Kirsty catches her!

John Phillips: "McKinney caught her again!"

Mark Bravo: "That's twice now! Valentina gets airborne and Kirsty turns her into luggage!"

Kirsty has Valentina across her body, but Blaze immediately starts fighting.

Elbow to the side of the head!

Another!

Kirsty's grip slips.

Valentina drops behind her!

John Phillips: "Blaze escapes!"

Kirsty spins around.

Valentina drives a kick into the side of her knee!

Kirsty's leg buckles.

Another kick!

And a third!

Mark Bravo: "That's smart. If Kirsty can't plant those legs, she can't shoot, she can't lift you, and she can't throw you."

John Phillips: "And those legs are the foundation of virtually everything McKinney does."

Valentina fires a kick toward Kirsty's head—

CAUGHT!

John Phillips: "But Kirsty has the leg!"

Valentina immediately hops on one foot.

Kirsty pulls the leg toward herself.

Valentina jumps—

ENZUIGIRI!

The free foot catches Kirsty behind the ear!

McKinney releases her and drops to a knee.

John Phillips: "Beautiful counter from Valentina Blaze!"

Mark Bravo: "That's what I mean when I say Valentina is dangerous from anywhere. You think you've caught her and suddenly the other foot is hitting you in the skull."

Valentina pushes herself upright.

Kirsty is still on one knee.

Valentina runs toward the ropes.

Springboard—

ROUNDHOUSE!

FLASHPOINT CONNECTS AGAIN!

John Phillips: "FLASHPOINT!"

Kirsty collapses onto her back!

Valentina hooks both legs!

ONE!

TWO!

KIRSTY GETS A SHOULDER UP!

John Phillips: "And McKinney survives another one!"

Mark Bravo: "But look at her, John. This isn't Juno Sage in South Africa. Kirsty isn't walking through Valentina Blaze."

John Phillips: "Not even close. Valentina has forced McKinney to adjust throughout this match."

Valentina sits beside Kirsty for a moment, breathing heavily.

She looks toward the turnbuckles.

The crowd recognizes it immediately.

John Phillips: "Wait a minute."

Mark Bravo: "She's looking upstairs."

Valentina gets back to her feet.

She points toward the corner.

The Philadelphia crowd gets louder.

John Phillips: "If Valentina hits the Firestorm, this could be over!"

Mark Bravo: "Four hundred and fifty degrees from the top rope, and Kirsty can't wrestle you if you've flattened her into the canvas."

Valentina steps through the ropes and begins climbing.

Kirsty remains down.

Valentina reaches the second rope.

Then the top.

John Phillips: "Blaze is there!"

Valentina steadies herself.

Kirsty's eyes open.

Mark Bravo: "John."

John Phillips: "McKinney's moving!"

Kirsty rolls toward the corner.

Valentina realizes it.

She adjusts her footing—

KIRSTY EXPLODES UPWARD!

McKinney slams her forearm into Valentina's legs!

Valentina loses her balance!

She crashes down onto the top turnbuckle!

John Phillips: "Oh!"

Mark Bravo: "That'll put the fire out!"

Valentina sits precariously on the top turnbuckle.

Kirsty grabs her around the waist.

John Phillips: "This is a very dangerous position."

Valentina begins hammering downward with forearms.

One!

Two!

Three!

Kirsty staggers backward.

John Phillips: "Valentina fighting her off!"

Mark Bravo: "She needs to get Kirsty away from that corner and she needs to do it now."

Valentina gets one foot underneath herself again.

Kirsty charges back in.

Valentina kicks her in the face!

Kirsty stumbles backward!

Valentina stands!

John Phillips: "Here we go!"

Valentina launches—

MISSILE DROPKICK!

Both boots smash into Kirsty's chest!

McKinney goes flying backward!

The crowd erupts!

John Phillips: "What a dropkick!"

Mark Bravo: "And Kirsty McKinney is in trouble!"

Valentina rolls onto her stomach.

She's hurting too.

She crawls toward Kirsty.

John Phillips: "Blaze took a hard landing herself, but she knows how important this opportunity is."

Mark Bravo: "That's the thing about tonight. There is no 'good effort.' You don't get tournament points for taking somebody to the limit. There's one spot available in this match."

Valentina reaches Kirsty.

She hooks the leg!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—NO!

Kirsty jerks her shoulder off the canvas!

John Phillips: "Two and three quarters!"

Mark Bravo: "And look at Valentina!"

Valentina rolls onto her knees.

For the first time, frustration flashes across her face.

She brushes her hair backward and takes a deep breath.

John Phillips: "Valentina Blaze has thrown a lot at Kirsty McKinney."

Mark Bravo: "And that's when you've got to be careful. Don't start asking yourself what else you need to do. That's when you make mistakes."

Valentina looks down at Kirsty.

Then toward the turnbuckles again.

John Phillips: "She's thinking Firestorm again."

Mark Bravo: "I would. Kirsty stopped her the first time, but if Blaze lands that four-fifty, I don't care how good your amateur wrestling background is."

Valentina gets back to her feet.

She grabs Kirsty's wrist and starts pulling her away from the ropes.

Kirsty suddenly grabs Valentina's wrist with both hands.

John Phillips: "Wait!"

Kirsty yanks Valentina forward.

Valentina stumbles—

Kirsty rolls underneath!

She catches the leg!

Valentina crashes face-first onto the canvas!

Mark Bravo: "There! That's the mistake!"

Before Valentina can react, Kirsty is on her.

She threads her right arm underneath Valentina's left.

Hooks the wrist.

Her leg snakes around Valentina's ankle.

Kirsty rolls.

Valentina rolls with her.

Kirsty changes direction halfway through.

Suddenly Valentina is stacked onto her shoulders!

John Phillips: "Look at this!"

ONE!

TWO!

VALENTINA ESCAPES!

Mark Bravo: "That wasn't even the Shear Cradle! Kirsty can pin you from a dozen different positions."

Valentina rolls through and tries to stand.

Kirsty grabs her ankle.

Valentina kicks backward with the other foot!

Kirsty ducks it.

She pulls Valentina backward.

Valentina lands on her stomach.

Kirsty jumps onto her back.

John Phillips: "And again, McKinney immediately takes the back!"

Kirsty reaches for the neck.

Valentina immediately tucks her chin.

Mark Bravo: "Pitty Choke! Kirsty's looking for it!"

Kirsty tries forcing her forearm underneath the chin.

Valentina grabs her wrist with both hands.

Kirsty pulls.

Valentina holds on.

John Phillips: "Blaze knows exactly what's coming!"

Mark Bravo: "Knowing and stopping are two different things!"

Kirsty suddenly abandons the choke.

Instead, she grabs Valentina around the waist.

She gets her feet underneath herself.

Then stands.

With Valentina.

John Phillips: "Look at the strength!"

Valentina desperately grabs for the ropes.

Too far.

Kirsty lifts—

K-LIFT!

Valentina is hauled off the canvas in the stalling gutwrench!

Mark Bravo: "Oh boy."

Kirsty holds her there.

One second.

Two.

Three.

Valentina kicks her legs, trying to shift her weight.

John Phillips: "Valentina trying anything she can to change her center of gravity!"

Mark Bravo: "That's a woman who understands leverage herself, but right now Kirsty's got her."

Kirsty's face tightens.

Then she violently throws Valentina over!

VALENTINA CRASHES INTO THE CANVAS!

John Phillips: "GOOD LORD!"

Valentina bounces from the impact and rolls onto her side.

Kirsty sits up.

Her hair hangs across her face.

She pushes it away.

And glares at Valentina.

Mark Bravo: "There's that look again."

John Phillips: "McKinney isn't satisfied."

Mark Bravo: "That's what worries me. Earlier in her UTA run, Kirsty would've probably been looking for a pin right there."

John Phillips: "Instead she's getting back up."

Kirsty rises.

Valentina is down on all fours, trying desperately to recover.

Kirsty walks toward her.

Slowly.

John Phillips: "Valentina Blaze has given Kirsty McKinney everything she can handle tonight."

Mark Bravo: "And I think that's making Kirsty even angrier."

Kirsty reaches down.

Grabs Valentina around the waist.

And begins dragging her back to her feet.

Kirsty reaches down.

Grabs Valentina around the waist.

And begins dragging her back to her feet.

John Phillips: "McKinney going back to that waist again, and Valentina has got to find some way to break that grip."

Mark Bravo: "Easier said than done. Kirsty has been doing this since she was a kid. Position, leverage, control. None of it is accidental."

Valentina gets one foot underneath herself.

Then the other.

Kirsty tightens the waistlock.

Valentina immediately drops her weight.

John Phillips: "Blaze trying to keep that center of gravity low."

Kirsty attempts to lift.

Valentina blocks it.

Kirsty tries again.

Valentina hooks her leg around Kirsty's!

Mark Bravo: "Good defense!"

Valentina reaches down and begins pulling at Kirsty's hands.

One finger comes loose.

Then another.

Kirsty's grip breaks!

John Phillips: "She got free!"

Valentina spins around—

FOREARM!

Kirsty's head snaps sideways.

Valentina hits another!

And another!

John Phillips: "Blaze unloading!"

Kirsty fires back with a heavy right hand!

Valentina staggers.

Mark Bravo: "Kirsty doesn't want a striking match, but don't confuse that with not being able to hit."

Kirsty steps forward.

Another right—

Valentina ducks!

Kick to the ribs!

Kirsty folds slightly.

Valentina drives a knee upward!

Kirsty catches it!

John Phillips: "Caught again!"

Kirsty has Valentina's leg tucked beneath one arm.

Valentina immediately starts hopping backward.

Kirsty steps with her.

Valentina suddenly leaps and twists—

Her free leg swings toward Kirsty's head!

Kirsty ducks!

Valentina lands on the canvas!

And Kirsty never lets go of the leg.

Mark Bravo: "That's bad."

Kirsty drops her weight across Valentina's hips.

She traps the ankle between her legs.

Valentina immediately recognizes the danger and turns toward the ropes.

John Phillips: "McKinney attacking the leg now!"

Kirsty twists the ankle.

Valentina cries out.

She reaches for the bottom rope.

Still several feet away.

Mark Bravo: "And this isn't some standard ankle lock. Watch Kirsty's legs. Valentina's knee is trapped too."

John Phillips: "Blaze can't simply roll through it."

Valentina tries anyway.

Kirsty rolls with her.

Then abruptly changes direction.

Valentina is forced onto her stomach!

Kirsty pulls the trapped leg upward.

John Phillips: "Oh, look at the pressure on the knee!"

Valentina pounds the canvas once with her fist.

Not a submission.

Frustration.

Pain.

Then she starts dragging herself forward.

John Phillips: "Valentina refusing to give it up!"

Mark Bravo: "But every inch she crawls, she's dragging Kirsty's entire body weight with her."

Valentina reaches.

Nothing.

She pulls herself again.

Kirsty cranks harder.

Valentina screams.

John Phillips: "The referee asking Blaze if she wants to submit!"

Valentina violently shakes her head.

Mark Bravo: "Absolutely not. Not tonight. You tap out and your Ring King tournament ends before it starts."

Valentina digs her fingers into the canvas.

Pulls.

Reaches—

THE BOTTOM ROPE!

John Phillips: "She's got it!"

The referee immediately calls for the break.

Kirsty doesn't release.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

FOUR!

Kirsty finally lets go.

John Phillips: "Come on, Kirsty!"

Mark Bravo: "Four is legal."

John Phillips: "You keep saying that."

Mark Bravo: "Because you keep getting mad at legal things."

Kirsty stands.

The referee gets between her and Valentina, warning McKinney about the count.

Kirsty stares at him.

Then slowly raises four fingers.

She gives an exaggerated shrug.

Mark Bravo: "See? She can count."

John Phillips: "That's not the issue."

Kirsty turns away from the referee.

Valentina is using the ropes to pull herself upright.

She tests her leg.

It nearly gives out.

John Phillips: "And now the complexion of this match has changed considerably."

Mark Bravo: "Absolutely. Think about Valentina's offense. The kicks. The springboards. The Firefly Plancha. The Firestorm. Almost everything she does depends on those legs."

John Phillips: "And Kirsty McKinney knows that."

Kirsty charges.

Valentina sees her coming!

She pulls herself between the ropes!

Kirsty stops short.

Valentina drives a shoulder through the ropes into Kirsty's stomach!

John Phillips: "Blaze still fighting!"

Kirsty doubles over.

Valentina grabs the top rope.

She tries to springboard—

Her damaged leg buckles!

Valentina falls awkwardly onto the apron!

John Phillips: "The knee!"

Mark Bravo: "That's exactly what we were talking about!"

Valentina clutches her leg.

Kirsty looks at her.

And immediately goes after it.

She grabs Valentina by the ankle through the ropes!

Valentina kicks desperately with her free foot!

Once!

Twice!

The third catches Kirsty in the jaw!

Kirsty stumbles backward.

John Phillips: "Valentina creates some separation!"

Blaze pulls herself upright on the apron.

Kirsty charges again!

Valentina jumps!

METEORA FROM THE APRON!

Both knees crash into Kirsty's chest!

McKinney goes down!

Valentina immediately grabs the damaged knee.

John Phillips: "She hit it, but she paid for it!"

Mark Bravo: "That's the gamble. Valentina knows those knees are weapons, but Kirsty has damaged the platform they're attached to."

Valentina grimaces.

She looks down at Kirsty.

Then forces herself upright.

John Phillips: "Blaze knows she cannot waste this opening."

Kirsty begins to rise.

Valentina grabs the ropes.

She launches herself forward—

KICK!

Kirsty takes it across the face!

McKinney falls backward!

John Phillips: "Right on the button!"

Valentina covers!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—KIRSTY KICKS OUT!

John Phillips: "Another near fall!"

Mark Bravo: "And Valentina Blaze is making Kirsty work for every second of this."

Valentina rolls onto her back.

Both women remain down.

The Philadelphia crowd begins clapping rhythmically.

John Phillips: "What a way to begin Road to the Throne."

Mark Bravo: "And remember, we're talking about the first qualifying match. This is what Ring King means. Neither woman wants to be the first person tonight to walk back through that curtain knowing the opportunity is gone."

Valentina rolls toward the ropes.

Kirsty turns onto her stomach.

Both begin pushing themselves up.

John Phillips: "Kirsty came into this match angry. She came in looking to hurt somebody. But there's something she has to be realizing right about now."

Mark Bravo: "Valentina Blaze can take it."

John Phillips: "And she can give it right back."

Kirsty reaches her knees first.

Valentina gets one foot underneath herself.

Kirsty looks across the ring.

Valentina looks back.

For several seconds, neither woman moves.

Then Kirsty rises.

Valentina follows.

Valentina throws a forearm!

It connects!

Kirsty answers with one of her own!

John Phillips: "And now they're trading!"

Valentina!

Kirsty!

Valentina!

Kirsty!

Mark Bravo: "This is not where Kirsty normally wants to be!"

Valentina fires again!

Kirsty staggers!

Another from Blaze!

Kirsty backs toward the ropes!

John Phillips: "Valentina getting the better of the exchange!"

Valentina winds up—

Kirsty suddenly changes levels!

DOUBLE LEG TAKEDOWN!

Valentina hits the mat!

Mark Bravo: "And there's the wrestler!"

Kirsty immediately climbs into mount.

Valentina covers up.

Kirsty drives a forearm down!

Another!

Another!

John Phillips: "This isn't the Kirsty McKinney who was content to simply control somebody on the mat!"

Valentina bucks her hips.

Kirsty rides the movement.

Valentina tries again.

Kirsty shifts higher.

Then drives another forearm across Valentina's face!

Mark Bravo: "No. This is what we've been seeing lately. She's still got all that technique, except now there's some genuine malice attached to it."

Valentina turns sideways, trying to escape the mount.

Kirsty grabs her around the waist.

Valentina continues rolling.

Kirsty follows.

Valentina gets to her knees—

Kirsty hooks underneath both arms!

John Phillips: "McKinney has her!"

Kirsty powers Valentina upward.

Valentina's feet leave the mat.

She desperately kicks her legs.

Kirsty shifts her grip.

Valentina suddenly twists!

She slips free!

John Phillips: "NO! Blaze gets out!"

Valentina lands behind Kirsty.

Kirsty turns around—

BLAZE TRIGGER!

THE JUMPING HIGH KNEE CATCHES KIRSTY RIGHT ON THE JAW!

John Phillips: "BLAZE TRIGGER!"

Mark Bravo: "SHE GOT ALL OF IT!"

Kirsty collapses!

Valentina lands badly on the damaged leg!

She cries out and drops beside Kirsty!

John Phillips: "But Valentina can't capitalize!"

Mark Bravo: "That's the damage Kirsty did earlier! If that knee was healthy, Valentina would already be climbing!"

The crowd rises.

Valentina grabs her knee.

She looks toward Kirsty.

Then toward the corner.

John Phillips: "The Blaze Trigger is the setup."

Mark Bravo: "We know what comes next."

Valentina grits her teeth.

She crawls toward the turnbuckles.

John Phillips: "She's going for Firestorm."

Kirsty remains flat on her back.

Valentina reaches the corner.

She grabs the middle rope.

Pulls herself up.

Her leg shakes beneath her.

Mark Bravo: "Can she even do it?"

John Phillips: "She's going to try!"

Valentina steps onto the middle turnbuckle.

Then carefully brings the injured leg up.

Kirsty still hasn't moved.

Valentina reaches the top.

The entire Xfinity Mobile Arena comes to its feet.

John Phillips: "Valentina Blaze is one move away from Ring King!"

Valentina steadies herself.

She looks down at Kirsty.

Raises her fist.

Valentina Blaze: "LIGHT IT UP!"

Valentina launches herself from the top rope!

John Phillips: "FIRESTORM!"

Valentina begins rotating through the 450—

KIRSTY MOVES!

John Phillips: "NOBODY HOME!"

VALENTINA CRASHES INTO THE CANVAS!

The impact bounces her off the mat!

She rolls onto her side, clutching her ribs.

Mark Bravo: "That might be it! She put everything into that!"

John Phillips: "Valentina Blaze took the gamble, and Kirsty McKinney got out of the way at the last possible second!"

Kirsty lies near the ropes.

Valentina lies several feet away.

Neither woman is moving.

John Phillips: "And now the question is which one of these women can recover first."

Mark Bravo: "Because whoever does may be headed to Ring King."

Both women remain down.

The referee looks from Kirsty McKinney to Valentina Blaze.

Then begins his count.

ONE!

TWO!

John Phillips: "That Firestorm may have done as much damage to Valentina as it would've done to Kirsty."

Mark Bravo: "That's the risk of the four-fifty, John. When you hit it, it's spectacular. When you don't, gravity doesn't care whose side the crowd is on."

THREE!

Kirsty rolls onto her stomach.

Valentina curls onto her side, one arm wrapped around her ribs.

FOUR!

John Phillips: "McKinney beginning to stir."

Kirsty plants one hand against the canvas.

FIVE!

Valentina reaches toward the ropes.

Mark Bravo: "They're both moving, but neither one of them is moving particularly well."

SIX!

Kirsty reaches her knees.

Valentina grabs the bottom rope.

SEVEN!

Kirsty gets one foot beneath herself.

Valentina pulls herself upward.

The referee stops the count.

John Phillips: "Both women beat the count, and this match continues."

Kirsty stands near the center of the ring.

She looks across at Valentina.

Valentina is leaning against the ropes, still clutching her ribs.

Kirsty's eyes narrow.

Mark Bravo: "And there's the scary part. Kirsty's had a few seconds to think."

John Phillips: "That's scary?"

Mark Bravo: "With her? Absolutely."

Kirsty marches forward.

Valentina sees her coming.

Kirsty reaches—

VALENTINA KICKS HER!

The boot catches Kirsty across the chest!

Kirsty takes a step backward.

John Phillips: "Blaze still has some fight!"

Valentina pushes away from the ropes.

Another kick!

Kirsty absorbs it.

Valentina fires a third—

Kirsty catches the leg!

Mark Bravo: "Not again."

Valentina immediately jumps—

Kirsty ducks the enzuigiri!

Valentina crashes onto her stomach!

Kirsty still has the ankle!

John Phillips: "Kirsty learned from it this time!"

McKinney violently yanks Valentina backward across the canvas.

Valentina reaches for the ropes.

Kirsty pulls her into the center!

Mark Bravo: "That's what separates somebody like Kirsty McKinney. You show her the same escape twice, you better have a third one."

Kirsty drops onto Valentina's back.

She reaches for the neck.

Valentina immediately tucks her chin!

John Phillips: "Pitty Choke again!"

Kirsty tries forcing her arm underneath.

Valentina catches the wrist.

Both hands!

She keeps Kirsty's arm away!

John Phillips: "Blaze defending it!"

Mark Bravo: "And she's doing exactly what she needs to do. Protect the neck first. Figure out the rest second."

Kirsty pulls harder.

Valentina refuses to let the arm underneath her chin.

Kirsty pauses.

Then releases the choke entirely.

John Phillips: "McKinney lets it go."

Mark Bravo: "Which probably means she's thought of something worse."

Kirsty grabs Valentina's wrist.

She pulls the arm behind her back.

Valentina winces.

Kirsty traps it there with her knee.

Then reaches across and grabs the other arm.

John Phillips: "Look at this positioning."

Valentina suddenly has no hands underneath her.

Kirsty drives her weight forward.

VALENTINA'S FACE HITS THE CANVAS!

John Phillips: "Oh!"

Mark Bravo: "That's just mean."

Kirsty releases one arm.

Valentina immediately tries to push herself up with it.

Kirsty grabs her around the waist.

She stands.

Valentina is pulled up with her.

John Phillips: "McKinney going back to the waistlock."

Kirsty lifts—

GERMAN SUPLEX!

Valentina lands high across her shoulders!

Kirsty maintains the grip!

Mark Bravo: "She's not done!"

Kirsty rolls sideways.

She drags Valentina back up.

Valentina fires an elbow backward!

Kirsty takes it across the cheek!

Another elbow!

Another!

John Phillips: "Valentina trying desperately to stop the second suplex!"

Kirsty's grip breaks!

Valentina turns around.

FOREARM!

Kirsty staggers!

Another!

McKinney backs up!

Mark Bravo: "Every time Kirsty thinks she's got her broken down, Valentina finds something else!"

Valentina winds up.

Kirsty swings first!

Valentina ducks!

She hits the ropes!

Kirsty turns—

RUNNING BULLDOG!

KIRSTY'S FACE IS DRIVEN INTO THE MAT!

John Phillips: "BULLDOG!"

Valentina rolls Kirsty over!

Hooks the leg!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—NO!

John Phillips: "KIRSTY KICKS OUT!"

Mark Bravo: "How many times has Valentina been this close tonight?"

Valentina sits upright.

She looks toward the referee.

Two fingers.

The referee confirms it.

John Phillips: "Blaze thought she had her."

Mark Bravo: "She's been a half-second away more than once."

Valentina exhales.

Then slaps the canvas.

She forces herself back up.

John Phillips: "But look at Valentina. No arguing. No wasting time."

Mark Bravo: "She knows Kirsty is too dangerous to give her thirty seconds while you complain about a count."

Kirsty crawls toward the ropes.

Valentina stalks behind her.

Kirsty gets to one knee.

Valentina grabs her.

Kirsty suddenly turns—

FOREARM!

Valentina staggers backward!

Kirsty charges!

CORKSCREW FOREARM SMASH!

VALENTINA GOES DOWN!

John Phillips: "McKinney nearly took her head off!"

Mark Bravo: "And Kirsty didn't even look at the referee!"

She doesn't cover.

Kirsty grabs Valentina by the hair and pulls her upward.

John Phillips: "There's no reason for that."

The referee immediately warns Kirsty about the hair.

Kirsty releases it.

Then grabs Valentina around the waist instead.

Mark Bravo: "There. Happy?"

John Phillips: "Not particularly."

Kirsty muscles Valentina upward.

BELLY-TO-BELLY SUPLEX!

Valentina crashes down!

Kirsty immediately gets back up.

John Phillips: "Again, no cover!"

Mark Bravo: "That's the part I don't understand."

Valentina rolls onto her stomach.

Kirsty stands over her.

John Phillips: "You said earlier that Kirsty came into this match angry."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, but there's winning angry and there's stupid angry. She's had opportunities to cover Valentina."

John Phillips: "McKinney has spent weeks talking about how much she prefers singles competition. How multi-person matches allow, in her words, inferior wrestlers to steal victories."

Mark Bravo: "Well, there are only two people in this ring. If you want to prove the point, pin her."

Kirsty bends down.

She grabs Valentina around the waist.

Valentina is barely standing as Kirsty pulls her upright.

Kirsty ducks underneath.

She gets Valentina seated across her shoulders!

John Phillips: "Wait a minute!"

Mark Bravo: "She's got her up!"

Kirsty stands with Valentina seated high across her shoulders.

Valentina suddenly realizes what's coming.

John Phillips: "Front electric chair position!"

Valentina begins hammering punches into Kirsty's forehead!

One!

Two!

Three!

Kirsty wobbles!

Mark Bravo: "Valentina's got to get down!"

Valentina throws another!

Kirsty's knees bend.

Valentina twists her body—

SHE SLIPS OFF!

John Phillips: "BLAZE ESCAPES!"

Valentina lands behind Kirsty!

Kirsty spins—

SPINNING BACK KICK!

Kirsty doubles over!

Valentina hits the ropes!

John Phillips: "Blaze has another opening!"

Kirsty raises her head—

VALENTINA LEAPS!

John Phillips: "BLAZE TRIGGER—"

KIRSTY SIDESTEPS!

Valentina sails past!

She lands on the damaged leg!

IT BUCKLES!

John Phillips: "THE KNEE GAVE OUT!"

Valentina drops to one knee.

Kirsty turns.

Her eyes lock onto Valentina.

Mark Bravo: "Uh-oh."

Kirsty charges.

CORKSCREW FOREARM!

VALENTINA IS BLASTED SIDEWAYS!

John Phillips: "What a shot!"

Valentina collapses.

Kirsty immediately grabs her.

She pulls Valentina up.

Ducks underneath.

And lifts her onto her shoulders again!

Mark Bravo: "This time Valentina doesn't have anything left to fight with!"

Kirsty has her seated in the front electric chair.

Valentina weakly throws a punch downward.

It barely connects.

Kirsty leans forward—

AND VIOLENTLY DRIVES VALENTINA CHEST AND FACE-FIRST INTO THE CANVAS!

John Phillips: "GOOD GOD!"

Mark Bravo: "That's the setup!"

Valentina bounces from the impact.

She rolls onto her back.

Her eyes are open, but unfocused.

Kirsty sits beside her.

John Phillips: "Now cover her!"

Kirsty looks down at Valentina.

Then at the referee.

Then back at Valentina.

Mark Bravo: "Wait."

Kirsty reaches for Valentina's legs.

John Phillips: "McKinney isn't going for a conventional cover."

Kirsty begins threading her legs into position.

Mark Bravo: "Shear Cradle."

Valentina realizes it.

Suddenly she comes alive!

She kicks wildly!

John Phillips: "Valentina knows what's coming!"

Kirsty tries to cinch the legs.

Valentina kicks her away!

Kirsty rolls backward!

Valentina scrambles toward the ropes!

Mark Bravo: "She got away!"

Valentina reaches the ropes.

She grabs the middle strand.

Kirsty is already back on her feet.

John Phillips: "Valentina Blaze is surviving on instinct right now!"

Kirsty walks toward her.

Valentina pulls herself upright.

She turns.

Kirsty reaches for her—

SLAP!

Valentina slaps Kirsty across the face!

The crowd erupts!

John Phillips: "Whoa!"

Kirsty freezes.

Valentina is barely standing.

She stares directly into Kirsty's eyes.

Then motions for her to come on.

Mark Bravo: "I don't know if that was brave or catastrophically stupid."

John Phillips: "Valentina Blaze told us who she is from the moment she arrived here. Fearless."

Kirsty slowly turns her head back toward Valentina.

The detached irritation is gone.

Now she looks furious.

Mark Bravo: "Well, she got Kirsty's attention."

Valentina throws a forearm!

Kirsty takes it!

Valentina throws another!

Kirsty takes that too!

A third!

Kirsty staggers half a step!

John Phillips: "Blaze is still coming!"

Valentina pulls Kirsty toward her—

KNEE!

Kirsty catches it against the chest!

Valentina tries another—

KIRSTY CATCHES THE LEG!

Mark Bravo: "There it is!"

Kirsty sweeps the standing leg!

Valentina crashes onto her back!

Kirsty dives on her immediately!

Valentina tries to turn away.

Kirsty follows.

Valentina rolls again.

Kirsty traps one leg.

Then the other.

John Phillips: "She's got the legs!"

Valentina reaches desperately toward the ropes.

Kirsty rolls through.

Valentina's shoulders are forced against the canvas!

Kirsty's legs clamp down around her in the Shear Cradle!

Mark Bravo: "SHEAR CRADLE!"

Valentina immediately starts fighting!

Her free arm reaches toward the ropes!

Too far!

ONE!

Valentina twists!

Kirsty tightens the legscissors.

Valentina grimaces from the pressure!

TWO!

John Phillips: "Valentina trying to break the cradle!"

Valentina kicks.

She twists again.

For just a moment, one shoulder begins to rise—

Kirsty adjusts.

She bears down.

The shoulder is forced flat again.

Mark Bravo: "Kirsty corrected it!"

The referee's hand comes down—

THREE!

DING! DING! DING!

The referee immediately signals for the bell as Kirsty McKinney releases the Shear Cradle.

John Phillips: "Kirsty McKinney has done it!"

Mark Bravo: "And that was not easy."

Valentina Blaze rolls onto her side, clutching at her ribs and damaged leg as Kirsty pushes herself back to a seated position.

For a moment, Kirsty simply sits there.

Breathing heavily.

Hair hanging across her face.

Expression still somewhere between exhaustion and irritation.

John Phillips: "What a fight from Valentina Blaze."

Mark Bravo: "She pushed Kirsty McKinney further than I think Kirsty expected to be pushed tonight."

The ring announcer steps forward.

Ring Announcer: "Here is your winner... and advancing to the 2026 Ring King tournament... KIRSTY McKINNEY!"

The crowd responds with a mixture of cheers and scattered boos.

Kirsty gets one knee underneath herself.

Then stands.

The referee reaches for her wrist.

Kirsty allows him to raise it for approximately one second before pulling it away.

John Phillips: "Kirsty McKinney becomes the seventh official entrant into Ring King."

Mark Bravo: "And here's the thing, John. Kirsty's been telling everybody for weeks that singles matches are where you find out who the better wrestler actually is."

John Phillips: "Tonight she backed that up."

Mark Bravo: "She did. But she'd better give Valentina some credit, because there were multiple points in that match where Kirsty was one mistake away from being the one eliminated from this tournament."

Kirsty turns toward Valentina.

Blaze is sitting against the bottom turnbuckle now, still trying to catch her breath.

The two women look at one another.

John Phillips: "And I wonder if Kirsty understands that."

Kirsty stares at Valentina for several seconds.

Valentina looks back.

No fear.

No embarrassment.

Just disappointment.

Kirsty's jaw tightens.

Mark Bravo: "I don't think she's in a congratulatory mood."

Kirsty walks toward the corner.

The referee immediately moves closer, clearly ready in case McKinney decides this isn't over.

Kirsty stops a few feet from Valentina.

Valentina looks up at her.

Kirsty says nothing.

Neither does Valentina.

After several long seconds, Kirsty gives the smallest nod.

Not respect exactly.

But acknowledgment.

Then she turns away.

John Phillips: "Well, that may be as close as you're ever going to get to a compliment from Kirsty McKinney."

Mark Bravo: "Valentina earned that one."

"In Walks Barbarella" begins playing again.

Kirsty steps through the ropes and drops to the floor.

She begins walking up the entranceway.

No celebration.

No arms raised.

No stopping to soak in the moment.

John Phillips: "Kirsty McKinney came into Philadelphia angry, aggressive, and determined to prove that when you put one opponent across the ring from her, she can control the outcome."

Mark Bravo: "And now she's in Ring King."

John Phillips: "But Valentina Blaze made her earn every inch of it."

The camera cuts back to Valentina.

She has pulled herself upright using the ropes.

The Philadelphia crowd begins applauding.

Valentina hears it.

She looks around the building.

For a moment, the disappointment remains obvious on her face.

John Phillips: "And unfortunately for Valentina, that's the brutal part of tonight."

Mark Bravo: "There are no points for that performance. No consolation prize. Kirsty's moving on. Valentina isn't."

Valentina nods slowly.

Then raises one hand.

The familiar gesture.

Valentina Blaze: "LIGHT IT UP!"

Philadelphia responds loudly.

John Phillips: "She may not be going to Ring King, but Valentina Blaze has absolutely nothing to be ashamed of tonight."

Valentina steps carefully through the ropes and down to the floor.

We cut to Kirsty halfway up the entranceway.

She pauses.

The massive screen above the stage updates.

RING KING 2026

QUALIFIED

KIRSTY McKINNEY

Kirsty looks up at her own name.

She gives it the same expression she gives almost everything else.

A faint eye roll.

Then she disappears through the curtain.

Mark Bravo: "Of course."

John Phillips: "Seven names now officially in the tournament. Chris Ross. Hakuryu. Bobby Dean. Mikey Unlikely. Samuel Scythe. Emily Hightower. And now Kirsty McKinney."

Mark Bravo: "Nine spots left."

John Phillips: "And four more of them are going to be claimed tonight."

Speculation

Segment

We cut away from ringside and head backstage.

Melissa Cartwright stands in the interview area, microphone in hand.

Beside her is Trey Mack.

And standing just behind Trey's shoulder is Clovis Black.

Trey is dressed for competition, loose and relaxed despite the fact that his Ring King qualifying match is only moments away. He rolls his shoulders once, a faint grin on his face.

Clovis is the exact opposite.

Still.

Silent.

Unblinking.

Melissa Cartwright: "Ladies and gentlemen, I'm here with Trey Mack and Clovis Black, and both of these men have an opportunity to qualify for the 2026 Ring King tournament tonight."

Trey nods along.

Melissa Cartwright: "Trey, you're up next against Bianca Page of the Platinum Society."

Trey Mack: "Mmm-hmm."

Melissa Cartwright: "And later tonight, Clovis Black will face Lindsey Lothario of The Creed Method."

Trey looks over his shoulder toward Clovis.

Clovis doesn't move.

Trey Mack: "Busy night."

He grins.

Trey Mack: "I like busy nights."

Melissa Cartwright: "Before we get to those matches, though, there's something I have to ask both of you about."

Trey raises his eyebrows.

Trey Mack: "Oh, here we go."

Melissa Cartwright: "For several months, you and Clovis Black were fixtures alongside The Empire. But during UTA's international tour, we really didn't see either of you alongside Marie Van Claudio, Amy Harrison, or Valkyrie Knox."

Trey's grin slowly widens.

Melissa Cartwright: "And because of that, there has been speculation that perhaps you and Clovis are no longer part of The Empire."

Trey looks directly into the camera.

Then back at Melissa.

Trey Mack: "Speculation."

He chuckles.

Trey Mack: "That's what we're callin' it?"

Melissa Cartwright: "That's what people have been saying."

Trey Mack: "People say a lotta things, Melissa."

Trey shifts his weight and folds his arms.

Trey Mack: "See, that's what happens when everybody sittin' at home watches wrestling and starts thinkin' they know everything that's happening behind the curtain."

Trey Mack: "They don't see somebody standin' in a certain room for a few weeks and suddenly it's..."

Trey dramatically widens his eyes.

Trey Mack: "'Ohhhhhh! Something happened! They kicked 'em out! They broke up! There's trouble in The Empire!'"

He shakes his head.

Trey Mack: "Nah."

Trey Mack: "Ain't no trouble."

Trey Mack: "Ain't no fallout."

Trey Mack: "Ain't nobody quit."

Trey points downward for emphasis.

Trey Mack: "World travel happened."

Melissa listens.

Trey Mack: "That's it."

Trey Mack: "You take this whole damn company and start flyin' everybody from country to country, continent to continent, people got schedules. People got obligations. People got things that don't always line up nice and pretty just because a camera crew wants everybody standing together."

Trey shrugs.

Trey Mack: "Sometimes you can't be somewhere you're supposed to be."

Trey Mack: "Sometimes Clovis can't be there."

He jerks a thumb toward himself.

Trey Mack: "Sometimes I can't be there."

Trey Mack: "That ain't drama."

Trey Mack: "That's life."

Trey leans slightly toward Melissa's microphone.

Trey Mack: "And that's done now."

His playful expression fades just a little.

Trey Mack: "So lemme put all that rumor shit to bed right now."

Trey points toward the camera.

Trey Mack: "We Empire."

He points toward himself.

Trey Mack: "Me."

Thumb over the shoulder.

Trey Mack: "Clovis."

Trey Mack: "All the way."

Trey Mack: "Ain't halfway Empire."

Trey Mack: "Ain't Empire when it's convenient."

Trey Mack: "Ain't Empire only when everybody can fit in the same damn camera shot."

Trey smiles again.

Trey Mack: "It's all the way Empire, baby."

Behind him, Clovis gives one slow nod.

Trey Mack: "See?"

Trey gestures toward Clovis.

Trey Mack: "Big man's spoken."

Melissa Cartwright: "So there is absolutely no issue between the two of you and the rest of The Empire?"

Trey Mack: "No issue."

Trey Mack: "No problem."

Trey Mack: "No story."

He pauses.

Trey Mack: "Well..."

Trey smiles mischievously.

Trey Mack: "There is a story."

Melissa Cartwright: "And what's that?"

Trey Mack: "The story is The Empire got two opportunities tonight to put two more people into Ring King."

Trey straightens up.

Trey Mack: "That's the story."

Trey Mack: "That's what everybody oughta be worried about."

Melissa Cartwright: "Let's talk about your opportunity first. Bianca Page."

Trey immediately nods.

Trey Mack: "Bianca Page."

Melissa Cartwright: "She's been one of the most successful competitors in UTA this year. She's representing the Platinum Society tonight, and she comes into this match believing she's been overlooked."

Trey Mack: "Yeah."

Trey rubs his chin.

Trey Mack: "And maybe she has."

Melissa seems slightly surprised.

Trey Mack: "What? You thought I was gonna come out here and tell you Bianca Page ain't good?"

Trey shakes his head.

Trey Mack: "Nah."

Trey Mack: "Bianca good."

Trey Mack: "Bianca real good."

Trey Mack: "Platinum Society got themselves somebody who can go."

Trey takes a small step toward the camera.

Trey Mack: "But there's good..."

He taps his chest.

Trey Mack: "...and then there's the Mack Attack."

The grin returns.

Trey Mack: "Bianca wanna prove she's been overlooked?"

Trey Mack: "Cool."

Trey Mack: "Prove it."

Trey Mack: "Just understand she gotta prove it while two hundred and ninety pounds is runnin' straight through her."

Melissa Cartwright: "And if you win, you'll join Kirsty McKinney and all six UTA singles champions in the tournament."

Trey Mack: "When."

Melissa Cartwright: "Excuse me?"

Trey Mack: "You said if."

Trey smiles.

Trey Mack: "When."

Melissa Cartwright: "Fair enough. And what about Clovis? Lindsey Lothario has been gaining momentum themselves, and they've got The Creed Method behind them."

Trey slowly turns his head toward Clovis.

Clovis stares straight ahead.

Trey Mack: "Lindsey got a problem."

Melissa Cartwright: "Which is?"

Trey Mack: "They gotta wrestle Clovis."

Silence.

Melissa waits for more.

Trey looks at her.

Trey Mack: "What else you want me to say?"

He gestures toward Clovis.

Trey Mack: "Look at him."

Melissa does.

Clovis Black finally turns his eyes toward her.

Melissa very subtly shifts the microphone toward him.

Melissa Cartwright: "Clovis, anything you'd like to add?"

Clovis stares at Melissa.

Then into the camera.

Several seconds pass.

Clovis Black: "They'll understand."

That's it.

Clovis returns to silence.

Trey's face lights up.

Trey Mack: "See?"

Trey Mack: "Now that's twice he's spoken."

Trey laughs and pats Clovis once on the chest.

Clovis does not react.

Trey Mack: "Man's gettin' chatty tonight."

Melissa can't quite suppress a smile before turning her attention back to Trey.

Melissa Cartwright: "One final question. If both of you qualify tonight, there's always the possibility that somewhere down the road in Ring King, you could face each other."

Trey pauses.

He looks at Clovis.

Clovis looks back.

For the first time in the interview, Trey's answer doesn't come immediately.

Then the smile returns.

Trey Mack: "Then The Empire wins."

Melissa raises an eyebrow.

Trey Mack: "Think about it."

Trey Mack: "Sixteen people enter."

Trey Mack: "You start filling that bracket with Empire..."

Trey spreads his hands.

Trey Mack: "Eventually somebody gotta deal with us."

Trey Mack: "Maybe that's somebody else."

Trey Mack: "Maybe it's me."

Trey Mack: "Maybe it's him."

He gestures toward Clovis.

Trey Mack: "Either way?"

Trey looks directly into the camera.

Trey Mack: "Empire moves forward."

Trey takes a step away from Melissa.

Trey Mack: "Now, if you'll excuse me..."

He rolls his shoulders.

Trey Mack: "Bianca Page got herself an appointment."

Trey slaps his chest once.

Trey Mack: "And when I hit the gas..."

He backs away with a grin.

Trey Mack: "...everybody feels it."

Trey turns and heads down the hallway.

Clovis remains behind for a moment.

He looks into the camera.

Then toward Melissa.

Finally, he turns and follows Trey out of frame.

Melissa watches them leave.

Melissa Cartwright: "There you have it. Any rumors surrounding Trey Mack and Clovis Black's status with The Empire can officially be put to rest. And Trey Mack's opportunity to enter Ring King is coming up next."

Has it really been 7 years already?

Segment

Fade up.

We're backstage somewhere, with the always impeccable Melissa Cartwright and her trusty microphone facing the camera. Next to her, Kirsty McKinney, a white tanktop thrown over her wrestling gear.

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "Fans, I'm backstage here at UTA Road to the Throne, and I'm looking to catch a quick word with Kirsty McKinney, who was just victorious in her Ring King Qualifier. Kirsty, thanks for being here."

Kirsty gives Melissa a small nod.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "It's cool."

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "The first thing I have to ask you about is the reaction you've been getting from the fans lately. That's the second show in a row you've been cheered. Is that surprising to you in any way?"

Kirsty thinks about it for a moment.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "...Yeah. I guess you could say that. It's unexpected, at least."

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "I do have to admit, you haven't exactly been shy about preferring sport wrestling to pro wrestling, which makes it a little surprising."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "I've thought about that. And in a way I kind of hate it, because if I could make the kind of money I'm making here doing the sport the way I grew up doing it, I'd jump back to the Olympic mats in a split second."

She pauses.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "But even though pro wrestling wasn't my first love, Melissa, I've never showed up to an event without bringing my working boots."

Melissa waits. Kirsty gathers her thoughts.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "I'm doing stuff in the ring you almost never see in pro wrestling. And the competition here's a cut above what I was dealing with before. They're making me work harder to do it. I guess that gives the fans a good show... and they appreciate that."

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "To be honest, you didn't exactly make it look difficult against Juno Sage."

A tiny smile crosses Kirsty's face.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "She was slipperier than she looked. But she made a mistake I've seen a lot from BJJ and other joint-lock martial arts before. They think 'sport wrestling' and expect me to lie on top of them until they get a chance to hyperextend my arm."

She shakes her head.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Nope. I'm not lying on you. I'm arranging you."

Melissa raises an eyebrow.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Juno thought she could play it conservative until I slipped up and gave her space. I bet that works on people who wrestled some in high school and think that's enough to make you a mat wrestler."

Kirsty shrugs.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "But if you haven't been paying attention, I'm a little better than some high school kid."

A beat.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "...By a little I mean a lot. More than a lot. It's kind of my thing."

Another small shrug.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Anyway, Valentina was tougher than Juno. Infuriatingly squirmy. But I'm not going to sit here and tell you lucha's stupid. There's way too many great luchadors out there for that to make any sense. But I'm no luchador and never will be, so I decided I wasn't going to let her do any more flying than I could get away with."

A tiny smile.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Or dancing."

She shrugs again.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Seems like just about everything can turn into a weapon in pro wrestling. So I wasn't going to give her the chance. Just in case."

Melissa smiles.

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "Can you tell me what you mean by 'arranging'?"

Kirsty laughs quietly through her nose.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Oh gosh, Melissa... I can't give away all my trade secrets."

She holds up a hand.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "I can tell you a little bit, though. I started using the Electric Chair because getting somebody's wind knocked out helps make them... compliant."

A small grin.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "But honestly, there's a pretty big streak of not taking fighting fundamentals seriously enough in pro wrestling."

She gestures with one hand.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Case in point, Valentina didn't realize how dangerous it is if you can't get your elbow back to the mat. Once I realized she wasn't protecting that arm enough... the rest of the arranging got a lot easier."

Melissa nods thoughtfully.

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "It sounds like you're starting to like pro wrestling."

Kirsty takes another moment before answering.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "I feel like if people are going to cheer me, Melissa, I've got to be honest with them. I still stand by what I said about jumping back to the mats if there was a way to get paid doing it."

Another pause.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "But I've been doing this for seven years now and I can't say it's treated me wrong."

Melissa lets the silence sit.

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "I guess I've got one question left."

Kirsty looks over.

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "Do you like being cheered?"

Kirsty's mouth scrunches up as she thinks about it. It's unexpectedly cute.

After a few seconds, she smiles. Just a little bit.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "I absolutely do."

Close is Information

Segment

Elsewhere backstage.

The atmosphere immediately feels different.

No interview backdrop.

No production staff moving through frame.

Just a quiet concrete room somewhere deep inside the Xfinity Mobile Arena.

Lindsey Lothario sits on a folding chair.

Their hands are already taped.

Head lowered.

Focused.

A few feet away, Kairo Bey leans against the wall.

Lightly bouncing one heel against the concrete.

Restless energy.

Waiting.

Standing between them is Eli Creed.

Hands clasped behind his back.

Calm.

Smiling faintly.

Eli Creed: "Do either of you know what tonight is really about?"

Kairo looks toward him.

Lindsey raises their head.

Kairo Bey: "Getting into Ring King."

Eli smiles.

Eli Creed: "That's what they're calling it."

He slowly begins pacing.

Eli Creed: "A tournament."

Eli Creed: "Sixteen competitors."

Eli Creed: "One winner."

Eli stops.

Eli Creed: "That's the advertisement."

He looks toward Lindsey.

Eli Creed: "But advertisements are designed for people who need things simplified."

Lindsey gives the faintest smirk.

Eli Creed: "Tonight isn't about qualifying."

Eli Creed: "Tonight is about proving that everything we've done..."

He gestures between the three of them.

Eli Creed: "...has purpose."

Eli steps toward Lindsey.

Eli Creed: "Last week..."

Lindsey's expression immediately hardens.

Eli Creed: "...you stood across from Bobby Dean."

Pause.

Eli Creed: "The International Champion."

Eli Creed: "And you were inches away."

Lindsey looks down for a moment.

Eli Creed: "Inches from taking that championship."

Kairo watches quietly.

Eli Creed: "You won the match."

Eli Creed: "But you didn't leave with what you wanted."

Lindsey's jaw tightens.

Lindsey Lothario: "I know."

Eli immediately raises one finger.

Eli Creed: "Good."

Silence.

Eli Creed: "Feel that."

Lindsey looks at him.

Eli Creed: "Don't run from it."

Eli Creed: "Don't make excuses for it."

Eli Creed: "Don't blame Eric Dane Junior."

Eli Creed: "Don't blame Bobby Dean."

Eli Creed: "Don't blame me."

Eli crouches slightly so he's closer to Lindsey's eye level.

Eli Creed: "Use it."

A beat.

Eli Creed: "Because six months ago, Lindsey..."

He smiles.

Eli Creed: "...you would have turned that disappointment into noise."

Eli Creed: "You would've blamed someone."

Eli Creed: "You would've demanded attention."

Eli Creed: "You would've made sure everyone was looking at you."

Lindsey looks directly into Eli's eyes.

Eli Creed: "But that's not who walked out of Toronto."

Eli stands.

Eli Creed: "The person who walked out of Toronto knew they were close."

Eli Creed: "And close isn't failure."

Pause.

Eli Creed: "Close is information."

Lindsey slowly nods.

Eli Creed: "It tells you what's missing."

Eli Creed: "It tells you where you're weak."

Eli Creed: "And if you're willing to listen..."

Eli's voice becomes softer.

Eli Creed: "...it tells you exactly what to become."

Lindsey stands.

Now eye-to-eye with Creed.

Lindsey Lothario: "Clovis."

Eli smiles.

Eli Creed: "Clovis."

Lindsey Lothario: "He's what's next."

Eli Creed: "No."

Lindsey raises an eyebrow.

Eli Creed: "He's what's in the way."

Lindsey's smirk returns.

Eli Creed: "There is a difference."

Eli turns toward Kairo.

Kairo pushes himself away from the wall.

Eli Creed: "And you."

Kairo nods.

Kairo Bey: "Maxwell Jett."

Eli Creed: "Former UTA Champion."

Kairo smiles slightly.

Kairo Bey: "Former."

Lindsey lets out a quiet laugh.

Eli does not.

Eli Creed: "Do not make the mistake of allowing that word to make him less dangerous."

Kairo's smile fades.

Eli Creed: "Maxwell Jett is going to talk."

Eli Creed: "He's going to insult you."

Eli Creed: "He's going to insult me."

Eli Creed: "Probably Lindsey."

Lindsey shrugs.

Eli Creed: "He will tell you that you don't belong in the same ring."

Eli Creed: "That you haven't accomplished what he's accomplished."

Eli Creed: "That you're beneath him."

Eli steps closer to Kairo.

Eli Creed: "And every word will have one purpose."

Kairo Bey: "Make me mad."

Eli smiles.

Eli Creed: "Good."

Eli Creed: "Because an angry man chases."

Eli Creed: "And Maxwell Jett wants you chasing him."

Eli gestures toward Kairo's feet.

Eli Creed: "Your gift is movement."

Eli Creed: "Angles."

Eli Creed: "Timing."

Eli Creed: "You see openings other people don't."

Kairo nods.

Eli Creed: "So don't let Maxwell decide where you look."

Kairo thinks about that.

Kairo Bey: "Make him chase me."

Eli Creed: "Exactly."

Eli takes a step backward.

He looks at both of them now.

Eli Creed: "Two matches."

Eli Creed: "Two opportunities."

Eli Creed: "Clovis Black."

He looks toward Lindsey.

Eli Creed: "Power."

Eli Creed: "Violence."

Eli Creed: "A man who believes if he hits hard enough, eventually everybody breaks."

Lindsey rolls their neck.

Eli Creed: "So show him something stronger than power."

Lindsey Lothario: "Control."

Eli nods.

Eli Creed: "Maxwell Jett."

He turns toward Kairo.

Eli Creed: "Arrogance."

Eli Creed: "Manipulation."

Eli Creed: "A man who believes everyone eventually makes the mistake he needs."

Kairo Bey: "Then don't make one."

Eli tilts his head.

Eli Creed: "You'll make mistakes."

Kairo looks at him.

Eli Creed: "You're human."

A small smile.

Eli Creed: "Make fewer than he does."

Kairo nods.

Eli steps between Lindsey and Kairo.

One hand rests on Lindsey's shoulder.

The other on Kairo's.

Eli Creed: "Tonight, everybody else is trying to enter Ring King."

His eyes move between them.

Eli Creed: "We are doing something different."

Pause.

Eli Creed: "We're showing them what comes next."

Lindsey looks toward Kairo.

Kairo looks back.

Eli Creed: "Lindsey..."

They look toward him.

Eli Creed: "Last week, you almost became International Champion."

Eli's grip tightens slightly on their shoulder.

Eli Creed: "Tonight, stop being almost."

Lindsey slowly smiles.

Lindsey Lothario: "Clovis is gonna understand."

Eli turns toward Kairo.

Eli Creed: "And Kairo..."

Kairo waits.

Eli Creed: "Tonight you don't need to prove you're better than Maxwell Jett's résumé."

Pause.

Eli Creed: "You only need to be better than Maxwell Jett."

Kairo's grin returns.

Kairo Bey: "I can do that."

Eli smiles.

Eli Creed: "I know."

Eli removes his hands from their shoulders.

He walks toward the door.

Then stops.

Without turning around...

Eli Creed: "Break."

Lindsey stands straighter.

Eli Creed: "Bend."

Kairo rolls his shoulders.

Eli finally turns back toward them.

Eli Creed: "Build."

Lindsey and Kairo exchange another glance.

This time Lindsey extends a fist.

Kairo bumps it.

Eli opens the door.

Eli Creed: "Let's go to work."

Eli exits first.

Lindsey follows.

Kairo lingers for half a second.

He looks toward the camera.

That familiar Neon Ace confidence flashes through.

Kairo Bey: "Switch it on."

Kairo heads through the door.

Cut.

Trey Mack vs. Bianca Page

Match

The camera returns to ringside inside the Xfinity Mobile Arena.

The Philadelphia crowd is still buzzing following Kirsty McKinney's qualification earlier tonight as the Ring King logo fills the massive video screen above the entranceway.

John Phillips: "Welcome back to Road to the Throne, and our second Ring King qualifying match is coming up right now."

Mark Bravo: "And this one is interesting, John. Two completely different athletes, two completely different personalities, and two people who both believe they belong in that tournament."

John Phillips: "Trey Mack of The Empire will take on 'Classy' Bianca Page of the Platinum Society. One match. One winner. One spot in the field of sixteen."

Mark Bravo: "And Bianca has spent months telling anybody willing to listen—and plenty of people who weren't—that UTA hasn't given her the opportunities she deserves."

John Phillips: "Well, there can be no complaints tonight. Win this match and Bianca Page is officially in Ring King."

The lights inside the arena begin to shift.

Then the opening notes of "Wildest Dreams" by Taylor Swift begin playing throughout the building.

The reaction is immediate.

Boos pour down from the Philadelphia crowd.

Mark Bravo: "Listen to this warm Philadelphia welcome."

John Phillips: "Somehow I don't think Bianca Page is going to be bothered by it."

She isn't.

"Classy" Bianca Page emerges from backstage and stops at the top of the entranceway.

She stands there for several seconds.

Smiling.

Taking in the arena.

Taking in the boos.

And carrying herself like every single person in attendance paid admission specifically for the privilege of seeing her.

A moment later, Ace Andrews emerges behind her.

The Corporate Cutthroat adjusts the front of his expensive suit before taking his place alongside Bianca.

John Phillips: "And of course, Ace Andrews accompanying Bianca Page tonight."

Mark Bravo: "Fourteen-time World Champion. Three-time Hall of Famer. He's been around this business forever, and whatever else you want to say about Ace Andrews, having somebody with that experience in your corner matters."

John Phillips: "Especially in a match with stakes this high."

Bianca looks toward Ace.

Ace says something to her that the cameras cannot quite pick up.

Whatever it is, Bianca's smile grows.

She turns back toward the crowd.

Raises one hand.

And blows an exaggerated kiss toward the Philadelphia faithful.

The boos grow louder.

Bianca laughs.

Mark Bravo: "Oh, she loves it."

John Phillips: "Bianca Page has never lacked confidence."

Mark Bravo: "Why should she? Look at her résumé. She's won championships everywhere she's gone. Bianca didn't arrive in UTA trying to figure out whether she belonged here. She arrived believing everybody else needed to prove they belonged with her."

Bianca begins walking down the aisle.

Ace follows half a step behind.

Bianca smiles toward one side of the barricade.

A fan reaches out.

Bianca appears ready to slap their hand.

At the final second, she pulls hers away.

She runs it through her hair instead.

John Phillips: "Come on."

Mark Bravo: "What?"

John Phillips: "You saw that."

Mark Bravo: "She changed her mind."

John Phillips: "At the exact last second?"

Mark Bravo: "A woman is allowed to reconsider, John."

Bianca continues toward ringside.

John Phillips: "Whatever you think of her attitude, though, Bianca Page has backed up a lot of what she's said since arriving in UTA."

Mark Bravo: "That's what gets lost because people don't like her. Bianca's good. Really good."

John Phillips: "We've seen the victories. We've seen her go toe-to-toe with some of the best UTA has to offer. And during the international tour, Bianca continued establishing herself as a serious threat."

Mark Bravo: "Which is exactly why Ace Andrews has been so angry about her being overlooked. In their minds, Bianca should already have gold around her waist."

Bianca reaches ringside.

She stops.

Looks toward the ring.

Then slowly turns in a complete circle.

A slight twirl.

Her arms extending briefly as she presents herself to the arena.

The crowd responds with another chorus of boos.

Bianca smiles brightly.

Mark Bravo: "Classy."

John Phillips: "That's certainly what she calls herself."

Bianca approaches the steel steps.

Ace remains on the floor.

Before climbing, Bianca stops and looks toward him.

Ace reaches out and takes Bianca's hand.

He raises it slightly.

Almost presenting her to the audience.

Bianca raises her chin.

Another wave of boos.

John Phillips: "You'd think she had already won the tournament."

Mark Bravo: "Confidence, John."

John Phillips: "Arrogance."

Mark Bravo: "Rich people's confidence."

Ace releases her hand.

Bianca climbs the steps.

She reaches the apron.

Then stops.

She looks at the referee.

Then looks at the ropes.

Then back at the referee.

The message is obvious.

John Phillips: "Seriously?"

Mark Bravo: "What?"

John Phillips: "She wants the referee to open the ropes for her."

Mark Bravo: "Well, somebody should."

John Phillips: "She is about to wrestle a two-hundred-and-ninety-pound man."

Mark Bravo: "And?"

John Phillips: "I think she can manage the ropes."

Mark Bravo: "It's called standards."

The referee finally steps over and pushes the ropes apart.

Bianca smiles.

She gracefully enters the ring.

Ace applauds from the floor.

John Phillips: "Unbelievable."

Bianca walks directly to the middle of the ring.

She raises both arms out to her sides.

Head tilted slightly backward.

Eyes closed.

Soaking in every bit of the reaction.

Mark Bravo: "Look at that, John."

John Phillips: "I'm looking."

Mark Bravo: "That's a star."

John Phillips: "That's someone very pleased with herself."

Mark Bravo: "Same thing sometimes."

Bianca lowers her arms.

Her expression changes.

The smile remains, but the playful arrogance begins disappearing behind something considerably more focused.

She turns toward the entranceway.

John Phillips: "But this is where all of that stops mattering."

A graphic appears on the screen.

RING KING QUALIFYING MATCH

TREY MACK vs. BIANCA PAGE

John Phillips: "Bianca Page has wanted opportunity."

Mark Bravo: "She's got it."

John Phillips: "She has wanted UTA to treat her like one of its elite competitors."

Mark Bravo: "She's got a chance to prove it."

John Phillips: "But to get into Ring King, Bianca Page has to go through two hundred and ninety pounds of speed, power and swagger."

At ringside, Ace Andrews removes his tinted glasses.

He folds them carefully.

Slips them into his jacket.

Then looks toward the entranceway as well.

Bianca rolls her neck once.

She adjusts her wrist tape.

The smile is completely gone now.

John Phillips: "The Classy One is ready."

Mark Bravo: "And somewhere behind that curtain, so is the Mack Attack."

Bianca Page waits in the ring.

Ace Andrews waits at ringside.

All eyes turn toward the stage.

The arena lights begin to dim.

Deep purple and gold wash over the Xfinity Mobile Arena as a heavy funk-rap bassline starts thumping through the building.

Bianca Page remains in the ring, arms folded now, expression unimpressed.

Ace Andrews watches from ringside.

John Phillips: "And here comes her opponent."

The beat gets heavier.

Then Trey Mack steps through the curtain.

Solo.

No Clovis Black.

No other members of The Empire.

Just Trey.

Mark Bravo: "Interesting."

John Phillips: "Trey Mack making this walk by himself."

Mark Bravo: "And after what we heard backstage, I don't think anybody should read anything into that. Trey just told us The Empire is fine."

John Phillips: "He certainly did."

Trey stands at the top of the entranceway with a grin across his face.

He looks out over Philadelphia.

Rolls his shoulders.

Slaps himself once across the chest.

Then starts bouncing loosely from foot to foot.

John Phillips: "Trey Mack, six-foot-one, two hundred and ninety pounds, and that number doesn't really tell you the whole story."

Mark Bravo: "Not even close. You look at Trey and you think powerhouse. And he is. Then he starts moving and suddenly you've got two hundred and ninety pounds running around like a man fifty pounds lighter."

Trey starts down the entranceway.

Loose.

Rhythmic.

Almost dancing with the beat.

He points toward a few fans along the barricade, grinning when they shout back at him.

John Phillips: "And despite his affiliation with The Empire, Trey Mack has always had this uncanny ability to get a reaction out of a crowd."

Mark Bravo: "People like charisma, John. They know they probably shouldn't cheer him, but then Trey does Trey things and suddenly everybody's having fun."

Bianca rolls her eyes from inside the ring.

Ace notices.

He leans toward the apron and says something to her.

Bianca smirks.

John Phillips: "Bianca doesn't appear impressed."

Mark Bravo: "Bianca Page generally isn't impressed by anything that isn't Bianca Page."

Halfway down the entranceway, Trey's pace suddenly changes.

The loose bounce becomes a sprint.

John Phillips: "And there's that burst!"

Trey explodes toward the ring!

He dives under the bottom rope!

Slides almost halfway across the canvas!

And pops straight back to his feet.

Bianca immediately steps back toward her corner.

Mark Bravo: "See what I mean? Two ninety should not move like that."

Trey turns toward the hard camera.

Throws both arms wide.

Trey Mack: "MACK ATTACK!"

The crowd answers him loudly.

Trey laughs.

Bianca is decidedly less amused.

John Phillips: "Trey Mack has made no secret about what he wants tonight."

Mark Bravo: "Ring King."

John Phillips: "And ultimately, the UTA Championship opportunity that comes with winning it."

Trey turns toward Bianca.

The grin starts to fade.

His eyes narrow.

John Phillips: "And remember, Trey Mack has already challenged for the UTA Championship this year."

Mark Bravo: "He knows exactly what that level feels like."

John Phillips: "Which makes this tournament very important for him. This is a direct road back toward that title."

Trey walks toward the center of the ring.

Bianca steps forward from her corner.

They stop several feet apart.

Bianca looks Trey up and down.

Trey does the same.

Then smiles.

Bianca doesn't.

Mark Bravo: "There's your matchup right there."

John Phillips: "Bianca Page gives up a tremendous amount of weight, but she has the advantage in quickness, technique, and experience dealing with larger opponents."

Mark Bravo: "And Trey isn't just big. He creates momentum. Once he starts moving, stopping him becomes the entire problem."

Ace Andrews climbs onto the apron briefly.

The referee immediately turns toward him.

Ace raises both hands innocently.

He says something to Bianca through the ropes.

Bianca nods.

Ace drops back to the floor.

John Phillips: "And there is the other variable in this match."

Mark Bravo: "Ace Andrews."

John Phillips: "Trey Mack may be coming out here alone, but Bianca Page most certainly is not."

Mark Bravo: "And Ace doesn't have to touch anybody to influence a match. He's been doing this too long. He sees things from ringside that most people don't."

Trey glances toward Ace.

Ace gives him a small, smug wave.

Trey laughs and waves back.

John Phillips: "Trey doesn't seem particularly concerned."

Mark Bravo: "Yet."

The referee steps between the two competitors.

Bianca adjusts her wrist tape one final time.

Trey rolls his neck.

Then bounces lightly on the balls of his feet.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page representing Platinum Society."

Mark Bravo: "Trey Mack representing The Empire."

John Phillips: "Two factions with very different ambitions, but tonight those ambitions meet in the same place."

Mark Bravo: "One spot."

John Phillips: "One winner."

Trey and Bianca lock eyes.

Ace watches from the floor.

The referee checks both competitors.

Then signals toward the timekeeper.

John Phillips: "Trey Mack. Bianca Page. Ring King qualification on the line."

Mark Bravo: "And this one could get ugly in a hurry."

DING! DING! DING!

John Phillips: "And our second Ring King qualifying match is underway!"

Trey Mack immediately begins bouncing lightly on the balls of his feet.

Across from him, Bianca Page doesn't move nearly as much.

She watches.

Studies.

Ace Andrews stands just outside her corner.

Mark Bravo: "And Bianca better have a plan."

John Phillips: "She normally does."

Mark Bravo: "She weighs one hundred thirty pounds. Trey Mack weighs two hundred ninety. That's a hundred and sixty pounds she's giving away."

John Phillips: "Which means Bianca Page cannot afford to make this Trey's kind of match."

Mark Bravo: "Absolutely not. You don't plant your feet and prove how tough you are against somebody that much bigger. That's how you end up looking at the lights."

Trey takes a step toward the center.

Bianca circles away.

Trey steps toward her again.

Bianca continues circling.

Trey grins.

Trey Mack: "C'mon."

He motions toward himself.

Bianca stops.

Looks at him.

Then looks toward Ace.

Ace simply taps one finger against his temple.

John Phillips: "Ace telling Bianca to think."

Mark Bravo: "That's why he's out here. Don't fight Trey Mack's fight."

Bianca finally moves forward.

Trey raises his hands.

They begin to circle.

Bianca reaches forward—

Then quickly pulls back before Trey can grab her.

Trey smiles wider.

John Phillips: "Page testing the distance."

Bianca reaches again.

Trey lunges!

Bianca ducks underneath!

She spins around behind him.

Kick to the back of the knee!

Trey turns—

Bianca is already gone.

Mark Bravo: "That's how you do it."

Bianca backs toward the ropes with a smile.

Trey rubs the back of his leg.

Then nods slowly.

John Phillips: "Bianca isn't going to overpower Trey Mack, but she doesn't have to."

Mark Bravo: "Hit him and leave. Make him turn. Make him chase. Make that big body work."

Trey approaches again.

Bianca ducks underneath another attempted lockup.

Kick to the thigh!

Another!

Trey reaches for her.

Bianca slips sideways.

She fires a forearm into his back!

Trey turns quickly.

Bianca retreats.

She gives him a little smile.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page frustrating Trey Mack in the early going."

Mark Bravo: "But she needs to be careful with that smile."

John Phillips: "Why?"

Mark Bravo: "Because Trey likes having fun until somebody makes him mad."

Trey nods toward Bianca.

Then turns his head toward Ace Andrews.

Ace gives Trey a polite little clap.

Trey laughs.

Trey Mack: "Aight."

He turns back toward Bianca.

This time Trey doesn't immediately move forward.

Bianca does.

She steps within range.

Another kick toward the thigh—

TREY CATCHES IT!

John Phillips: "Got her!"

Bianca's eyes widen.

She immediately tries to pull away.

Trey holds onto the ankle.

Bianca hops backward.

Mark Bravo: "This is exactly where Bianca did not want to be."

Bianca jumps and throws an enzuigiri—

Trey ducks!

Bianca lands on the canvas!

Trey still has the leg.

John Phillips: "Trey read it!"

Bianca scrambles onto her back.

Trey looks down at her.

Grins.

Then violently pulls her toward him!

Bianca slides halfway across the ring!

Mark Bravo: "Oh boy."

Trey grabs Bianca around the waist.

He lifts.

Bianca's feet leave the canvas with almost embarrassing ease.

John Phillips: "Look at the power differential!"

Trey holds Bianca off the mat.

Bianca immediately begins hammering forearms into the side of his head!

One!

Two!

Three!

Trey absorbs them.

Then throws Bianca across the ring with a belly-to-belly suplex!

BIANCA FLIES!

John Phillips: "GOOD LORD!"

Bianca crashes onto her back and rolls toward the ropes!

Mark Bravo: "That's a hundred sixty pounds of difference right there!"

Trey pops back to his feet.

He throws his arms wide.

Trey Mack: "MACK ATTACK!"

The crowd responds.

Bianca sits against the bottom rope, glaring at him.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page just found out what happens when Trey Mack gets his hands on you."

Mark Bravo: "And that's exactly what she has to avoid."

Ace Andrews walks toward Bianca's position on the floor.

He speaks to her through the ropes.

Bianca nods.

John Phillips: "Ace immediately giving instructions."

Mark Bravo: "And that's valuable. Bianca just got launched halfway to Pittsburgh. You need somebody telling you to reset."

Trey approaches.

Bianca quickly slips underneath the bottom rope to the floor!

The crowd boos.

John Phillips: "And Bianca Page wants nothing to do with him right now."

Mark Bravo: "Smart."

John Phillips: "Convenient."

Mark Bravo: "Smart."

Bianca walks toward Ace.

Trey leans over the top rope.

He gestures toward the ring.

Trey Mack: "Come on, baby! We wrestlin'!"

Bianca turns toward him.

She raises one finger.

Bianca Page: "You'll wait."

Trey laughs.

John Phillips: "Both of these competitors are heels, neither is interested in winning Philadelphia's approval, and we're seeing two very different kinds of arrogance."

Mark Bravo: "Exactly. Trey thinks he can run through Bianca because he's bigger and stronger. Bianca thinks she's smarter than everybody in the building."

John Phillips: "One of them is going to be proven right."

The referee begins counting.

ONE!

Ace speaks quietly into Bianca's ear.

TWO!

Trey starts bouncing against the ropes.

THREE!

Bianca turns back toward the ring.

FOUR!

She climbs onto the apron.

Trey immediately comes forward.

Bianca drops back to the floor!

The crowd boos louder.

Mark Bravo: "Ha!"

John Phillips: "Oh, come on!"

Trey stops in the middle of the ring.

His smile begins fading.

Mark Bravo: "And there it is."

John Phillips: "Bianca is starting to get under Trey's skin."

Bianca smiles from the floor.

Ace smiles beside her.

Trey points toward Bianca.

Trey Mack: "You cute."

Bianca blows him a kiss.

John Phillips: "This could become a mistake."

Mark Bravo: "For which one?"

The referee resumes counting.

ONE!

Bianca slowly walks toward the ring again.

TWO!

Trey takes several steps backward.

He motions for her to enter.

THREE!

Bianca climbs onto the apron.

Trey stays where he is.

FOUR!

Bianca steps between the ropes.

Immediately, Trey charges!

John Phillips: "HERE HE COMES!"

Bianca dives sideways!

Trey hits the ropes chest-first!

Bianca spins around—

SUPERKICK!

SWANKY CONNECTS!

Trey staggers backward!

John Phillips: "Bianca caught him!"

Mark Bravo: "That's what she was waiting for!"

Bianca doesn't cover.

She runs toward the ropes.

Rebounds.

HIGH KNEE!

BINX catches Trey under the jaw!

Trey drops to one knee!

John Phillips: "And suddenly Bianca Page has changed this match!"

Bianca hits the ropes again.

Trey begins standing.

Bianca launches herself—

DISCUS CLOTHESLINE!

RIGHT STUFF!

Trey rocks backward—

But he doesn't go down!

John Phillips: "Trey Mack is still standing!"

Bianca looks surprised.

She runs again.

Another discus clothesline!

Trey staggers!

Mark Bravo: "She's chopping down a tree!"

Bianca backs into the ropes.

Charges—

TREY EXPLODES FORWARD!

RUNNING CROSSBODY!

BIANCA IS FLATTENED!

John Phillips: "OH MY GOD!"

Trey lands across Bianca with all two hundred ninety pounds!

He hooks the leg!

ONE!

TWO!

BIANCA GETS THE SHOULDER UP!

John Phillips: "Two!"

Mark Bravo: "And that's the danger. Bianca put together an entire sequence. Three big shots. Trey needed one."

Trey sits beside Bianca.

He looks toward Ace Andrews.

Ace's expression is considerably less smug now.

Trey smiles.

Trey Mack: "She good!"

He nods toward Bianca.

Trey Mack: "She real good!"

Trey rises.

John Phillips: "And there's that personality from Trey Mack, but he cannot lose sight of what's at stake."

Mark Bravo: "Especially with Ace Andrews standing six feet away taking notes."

Bianca rolls onto her stomach.

Trey grabs her around the waist.

He begins pulling her upward.

Bianca immediately fires an elbow backward!

Trey absorbs it.

Another elbow!

Another!

John Phillips: "Bianca knows she cannot let Trey get underneath her again!"

Trey tightens his grip.

Bianca reaches toward the ropes.

Trey lifts her completely off the canvas!

Mark Bravo: "Too late!"

Trey turns toward the middle of the ring with Bianca trapped in his arms.

Bianca continues driving elbows backward into the side of his head.

One.

Two.

Three.

John Phillips: "Bianca fighting for her life here!"

Mark Bravo: "She's got to. If Trey gets his hips underneath her, this gets ugly fast."

Trey grimaces.

But keeps the grip.

He bends his knees.

Lifts—

Bianca shifts her weight!

She slips halfway over Trey's shoulder!

John Phillips: "Bianca trying to escape!"

Trey reaches back to secure her.

Bianca rakes the eyes!

John Phillips: "Oh, come on!"

Mark Bravo: "Ref didn't see it!"

Trey immediately releases her and grabs at his face.

Bianca lands behind him.

The referee questions Bianca.

She throws both hands up innocently.

Ace Andrews nods approvingly from the floor.

John Phillips: "That was blatant."

Mark Bravo: "Blatant would imply evidence."

John Phillips: "We just watched it."

Mark Bravo: "We aren't refereeing."

Trey turns around, still blinking.

Bianca charges.

SPEAR!

Bianca drives her shoulder into Trey's midsection!

Trey stumbles backward into the turnbuckles!

John Phillips: "Page found an opening!"

Bianca backs away.

Trey remains in the corner.

She charges again—

HIGH KNEE!

BINX catches Trey under the chin!

Mark Bravo: "There we go!"

Trey's head snaps backward against the turnbuckle.

Bianca grabs the top rope and begins driving repeated knees into his ribs.

One!

Two!

Three!

Four!

John Phillips: "Bianca staying on the body now."

Mark Bravo: "That's smart. You can't make two-ninety disappear, but you can make it harder to breathe."

The referee starts counting.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

FOUR!

Bianca steps away at the last moment.

She smiles at the referee.

Then turns back toward Trey.

John Phillips: "Both competitors willing to bend the rules tonight."

Mark Bravo: "They're heels, John. Nobody out here is applying for sainthood."

Trey pulls himself out of the corner.

Bianca charges again—

TREY CATCHES HER!

John Phillips: "Oh no!"

Trey lifts Bianca into the air!

POP-UP POWERSLAM!

BIANCA IS DRIVEN INTO THE CANVAS!

John Phillips: "WHAT A COUNTER!"

Trey covers!

ONE!

TWO!

BIANCA KICKS OUT!

Mark Bravo: "That was close."

John Phillips: "And this is exactly the problem Bianca keeps running into. She can control the tempo for stretches, but one clean collision from Trey Mack changes everything."

Trey rolls onto his knees.

He looks toward Ace.

Ace stares back.

Trey nods slowly.

Trey Mack: "Your girl tough."

Ace says nothing.

He simply points toward Bianca.

Mark Bravo: "Ace telling Trey to worry about the woman in the ring."

John Phillips: "For once, I agree with him."

Trey stands.

Bianca rolls onto her side.

Trey reaches down and pulls her up by the wrist.

Bianca immediately drives a forearm into his jaw.

Trey barely moves.

Bianca hits another.

Trey absorbs it.

A third.

Trey smiles.

John Phillips: "Bianca's hitting him, but she's not moving him."

Mark Bravo: "Not enough."

Bianca winds up again—

Trey grabs her wrist.

Pulls her in.

SHORT-ARM LARIAT!

Bianca flips inside out!

John Phillips: "Good grief!"

Trey drops across her for another cover.

ONE!

TWO!

BIANCA GETS THE SHOULDER UP!

Mark Bravo: "And Bianca is hanging around."

John Phillips: "That's the key. She doesn't need to dominate Trey. She needs to survive long enough to find the right opening."

Trey rises.

He pulls Bianca upright.

SCOOP SLAM!

Bianca bounces off the mat.

Trey hits the ropes.

John Phillips: "Here comes the speed!"

ROLLING SENTON!

Trey crashes across Bianca!

Mark Bravo: "Two hundred ninety pounds rolling over your ribs!"

Trey covers again.

ONE!

TWO!

BIANCA KICKS OUT!

John Phillips: "Still not enough!"

Trey sits upright.

His expression changes.

The playful swagger is fading.

Mark Bravo: "Now Trey's starting to get annoyed."

John Phillips: "And that's where he can become even more dangerous."

Trey grabs Bianca by the wrist and drags her toward the corner.

He pulls her to her feet.

Whip into the turnbuckles!

Bianca hits hard!

Trey backs into the opposite corner.

John Phillips: "Look at the distance he's creating."

Mark Bravo: "He's about to hit the gas."

Trey charges across the ring!

CORNER SPLASH—

BIANCA MOVES!

Trey crashes chest-first into the turnbuckles!

John Phillips: "Nobody home!"

Bianca immediately grabs him from behind.

SNAP DDT!

Trey's head is driven into the canvas!

Mark Bravo: "There it is! There's the opening!"

Bianca rolls Trey over.

Hooks the leg!

ONE!

TWO!

TREY POWERS OUT!

Bianca is thrown off the cover!

John Phillips: "And even after the DDT, Trey Mack still has enough power to launch Bianca off him."

Bianca sits up.

She looks toward Ace.

Ace raises two fingers.

Then taps the side of his head.

Mark Bravo: "Ace telling her she's close."

John Phillips: "And telling her not to get reckless."

Bianca gets back to her feet.

Trey begins pushing himself up.

Bianca waits.

Measures him.

Trey turns—

SWANKY!

SUPERKICK TO THE JAW!

Trey staggers!

But stays upright!

John Phillips: "Again, Trey absorbs it!"

Bianca looks frustrated.

She fires another superkick!

Trey takes it!

He drops to one knee!

Mark Bravo: "Now he's dropping!"

Bianca hits the ropes.

She charges—

DISCUS CLOTHESLINE!

RIGHT STUFF CONNECTS!

Trey goes down!

John Phillips: "She finally got him off his feet!"

Bianca doesn't cover.

Instead, she heads toward the corner.

John Phillips: "And Bianca may be thinking bigger now."

Mark Bravo: "She knows a normal cover isn't getting it done."

Bianca steps through the ropes.

She climbs to the top turnbuckle.

Ace watches closely from below.

Trey remains down.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page going upstairs!"

Bianca stands.

She leaps—

MAJESTIC!

THE TOP-ROPE ELBOW DROP CONNECTS!

John Phillips: "RIGHT THROUGH THE HEART!"

Bianca immediately hooks both legs!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—TREY KICKS OUT!

John Phillips: "NO! TREY MACK SURVIVES!"

Mark Bravo: "And now Bianca Page has to be wondering what exactly it's going to take."

Bianca sits beside Trey.

Her breathing is heavier now.

She looks toward the referee.

Then toward Ace.

Ace remains calm.

He makes a small downward motion with both hands.

John Phillips: "Ace telling her to stay composed."

Mark Bravo: "Because this is where people lose matches against someone like Trey. You get frustrated, you rush, and then—boom—Mack Truck."

Bianca nods.

She rises.

Trey rolls onto his stomach.

Bianca grabs him around the head and starts pulling him up.

Trey suddenly drives a body shot into her ribs!

Bianca folds.

Another body shot!

John Phillips: "Trey still has life!"

Trey stands.

Another heavy shot to the body!

Bianca backs away.

Mark Bravo: "And this is what Trey does. He absorbs punishment and then suddenly the momentum flips."

Trey fires a clubbing forearm!

Bianca staggers into the ropes.

Trey hits the opposite side.

He rebounds with speed—

RUNNING CROSSBODY!

BIANCA MOVES!

TREY CRASHES THROUGH THE ROPES TO THE FLOOR!

John Phillips: "Trey Mack just went all the way out!"

The crowd reacts loudly as Trey lands hard near ringside.

Bianca drops to one knee inside the ring.

Ace's eyes widen.

Then he immediately looks toward Trey.

Mark Bravo: "And now Ace Andrews is standing awfully close to Trey Mack."

John Phillips: "Keep an eye on him."

The referee checks on Bianca.

Ace steps toward Trey.

Trey begins pushing himself onto his hands and knees.

Ace looks toward the referee.

Still turned away.

Ace lifts his foot—

Then stops.

Trey looks up at him.

Ace smiles.

And slowly lowers his foot without touching him.

Mark Bravo: "Psychological warfare."

John Phillips: "Or Ace just decided the referee might turn around."

Trey gets to one knee.

He points at Ace.

Trey Mack: "I see you."

Ace spreads his hands innocently.

Inside the ring, Bianca is back on her feet.

She looks toward the ropes.

Then at Trey.

John Phillips: "Bianca sees him outside."

Bianca runs toward the ropes!

She leaps over the top—

SLINGSHOT SENTON ATOMICO!

ALLUENT CONNECTS ON TREY MACK!

John Phillips: "BIANCA PAGE TAKES HIM OUT!"

Both competitors crash to the floor!

Ace immediately steps away from the impact zone.

Mark Bravo: "That's a hundred thirty pounds using gravity to erase some of that size difference!"

Bianca rolls onto her side.

Trey remains flat on his back.

The referee begins counting both competitors.

ONE!

Ace crouches near Bianca.

TWO!

He talks quickly to her.

John Phillips: "And again Ace Andrews right there with the advice."

THREE!

Bianca gets onto her knees.

Trey begins rolling toward the ring.

FOUR!

Bianca notices.

She grabs Trey by the head.

Mark Bravo: "She's not letting him get back in first."

Bianca drives Trey face-first into the ring apron!

John Phillips: "Trey Mack eats the apron!"

FIVE!

Trey staggers backward.

Bianca rolls into the ring.

SIX!

She immediately rolls back out.

John Phillips: "And Bianca resets the referee's count."

Mark Bravo: "That's veteran awareness."

Bianca grabs Trey again.

Trey suddenly shoves her away!

Bianca crashes back-first into the barricade!

John Phillips: "And Trey has had enough!"

Trey charges—

BIANCA SIDESTEPS!

Trey crashes shoulder-first into the barricade!

Mark Bravo: "Bianca Page is making Trey Mack pay every single time he builds momentum."

Bianca stands over him for a moment.

Breathing hard.

Then she looks toward Ace.

Ace smiles.

Bianca smiles back.

John Phillips: "And you can see the strategy coming together."

Mark Bravo: "She's not overpowering him. She's redirecting him."

Bianca grabs Trey by the wrist.

She begins pulling him back toward the ring.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page has done a very good job of turning Trey's size and momentum against him."

Mark Bravo: "That's the only way to fight somebody this much bigger. Don't stop the truck. Change where it's going."

Trey suddenly plants his feet.

Bianca pulls.

Nothing.

She pulls again.

Trey doesn't move.

John Phillips: "And there's the size difference again."

Bianca slowly turns around.

Trey is staring at her.

The grin is gone.

Mark Bravo: "Uh-oh."

Trey jerks his arm backward.

Bianca is yanked straight toward him!

Trey catches her around the waist—

OVERHEAD BELLY-TO-BELLY ON THE FLOOR!

Bianca crashes hard against the ringside padding!

John Phillips: "GOOD GOD!"

Mark Bravo: "That's exactly why Bianca can't get caught!"

Ace immediately rushes toward Bianca.

Trey gets back to his feet.

He looks down at her.

Then at Ace.

He spreads both arms.

Trey Mack: "What happened?"

Ace glares at him.

John Phillips: "Trey Mack enjoying himself now."

Mark Bravo: "Maybe too much."

Trey grabs Bianca by the arm and pulls her back up.

Ace steps closer.

Trey turns toward him.

Ace immediately backs away with both hands raised.

John Phillips: "Ace wants no part of Trey physically."

Mark Bravo: "Ace Andrews is a retired wrestler, not a fool."

Trey rolls Bianca beneath the bottom rope.

Then follows her inside.

Bianca tries crawling toward the corner.

Trey grabs her ankle.

John Phillips: "Nowhere to go."

Bianca kicks backward with the free leg!

Trey catches that one too!

He lifts both legs.

Then swings Bianca away from the ropes and drops her onto her back!

Mark Bravo: "That's disrespectful strength."

Trey hits the ropes.

Bianca begins sitting up—

RUNNING BODY BLOCK!

Trey crashes through her!

John Phillips: "Bianca Page just got flattened!"

Trey hooks the leg.

ONE!

TWO!

BIANCA KICKS OUT!

Mark Bravo: "Still alive."

John Phillips: "But every knockout is costing her."

Trey kneels beside Bianca.

He looks toward the corner.

Then toward Ace.

Trey Mack: "She ready?"

Ace doesn't respond.

Trey stands and pulls Bianca upright.

He pushes her back into the corner.

John Phillips: "Trey Mack may be setting up that cannonball."

Mark Bravo: "And if he hits it, Bianca may not have enough left to stop the Mack Truck."

Trey backs into the opposite corner.

He bounces once.

Twice.

Then explodes across the ring!

CANNONBALL—

BIANCA MOVES!

Trey crashes back-first into the turnbuckles!

John Phillips: "MISSED!"

Bianca rolls away.

Trey sits stunned against the bottom turnbuckle.

Ace begins shouting instructions.

Mark Bravo: "Now! Bianca has to go now!"

Bianca gets back to her feet.

She charges!

DOUBLE KNEES TO THE CHEST!

Trey's head snaps backward!

John Phillips: "Right into the sternum!"

Bianca backs away.

Trey begins pulling himself upright with the ropes.

Bianca charges again—

SPEAR!

She drives Trey back into the corner!

Mark Bravo: "She's attacking the body over and over."

John Phillips: "Trying to take the air away from the bigger man."

Bianca grabs Trey by the head.

She jumps—

GRACEFUL!

ACE CUTTER!

Trey's face is driven into the canvas!

John Phillips: "GRACEFUL CONNECTS!"

Bianca rolls him over.

Hooks the leg!

ONE!

TWO!

TREY KICKS OUT!

Mark Bravo: "Again!"

Bianca slaps the mat in frustration.

Ace immediately shouts toward her.

Ace Andrews: "Stay on him!"

John Phillips: "Ace doesn't want Bianca wasting time."

Bianca gets up.

Trey rolls onto one knee.

Bianca charges—

HIGH KNEE!

TREY CATCHES HER!

John Phillips: "No!"

Trey lifts Bianca high into the air!

POP-UP POWERSLAM!

BIANCA CRASHES DOWN!

Mark Bravo: "That could be it!"

Trey hooks both legs!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—BIANCA GETS A SHOULDER UP!

John Phillips: "Two and nine-tenths!"

Trey sits up sharply.

For the first time, real frustration flashes across his face.

Mark Bravo: "Now he's wondering."

John Phillips: "Bianca Page has taken some tremendous punishment tonight."

Mark Bravo: "And she's still here."

Trey rises.

He grabs Bianca by both wrists.

Pulls her toward the corner.

John Phillips: "Trey may be thinking Crash Landing now."

Trey shoves Bianca back into the turnbuckles.

He backs away.

Then charges—

CANNONBALL CONNECTS!

TREY CRUSHES BIANCA IN THE CORNER!

John Phillips: "He got all of it!"

Bianca slumps forward.

Trey grabs her around the waist.

Mark Bravo: "This is the setup!"

Trey drags Bianca two steps out of the corner.

He pulls her upward—

Bianca suddenly drops to her knees!

John Phillips: "Bianca blocks the lift!"

Trey tries again.

Bianca grabs the middle rope!

The referee orders Trey to break.

Trey pulls once more.

Bianca refuses to let go.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

Trey finally releases her.

John Phillips: "Bianca survives the Mack Truck setup."

Trey argues with the referee for half a second.

Ace sees it.

Bianca sees Ace see it.

Mark Bravo: "Watch Ace."

Ace walks toward Bianca's corner.

He reaches onto the apron.

Not touching her.

Just pointing at Trey.

Bianca gets up behind him.

Trey turns around.

SWANKY!

SUPERKICK!

Trey staggers backward!

John Phillips: "Page caught him!"

Bianca runs the ropes.

BINX!

HIGH KNEE UNDER THE JAW!

Trey drops to both knees!

Mark Bravo: "He's down!"

Bianca hits the ropes again.

RIGHT STUFF!

DISCUS CLOTHESLINE!

Trey collapses onto his back!

John Phillips: "Bianca Page has finally put together enough offense to take Trey Mack completely off his feet!"

Bianca looks toward the corner.

Ace points upward.

Mark Bravo: "Ace wants Pure Elegance."

Bianca nods.

She heads toward the turnbuckles.

Climbs to the second rope.

Then the top.

John Phillips: "This could be it."

Bianca steadies herself.

Trey remains flat on his back.

Bianca leaps—

PURE ELEGANCE!

CORKSCREW MOONSAULT—

TREY GETS HIS KNEES UP!

John Phillips: "KNEES!"

Bianca crashes stomach-first across Trey's knees!

She bounces away, clutching her ribs!

Mark Bravo: "That's the risk!"

Trey rolls onto his side.

Bianca is curled up near the ropes.

John Phillips: "Bianca had Trey where she wanted him, and Trey Mack found one last answer."

Trey pushes himself up.

Slowly.

Bianca uses the ropes to stand.

Both competitors are exhausted now.

Mark Bravo: "This is becoming survival."

Trey gets to his feet first.

Bianca turns toward him.

Trey charges—

SPINNING BACK ELBOW!

Bianca ducks!

Trey spins through.

Bianca kicks the back of his knee!

Trey drops to one knee.

Bianca grabs his head—

SNAP DDT!

Trey's head is planted again!

John Phillips: "Another DDT!"

Bianca rolls onto her back beside him.

Neither competitor immediately moves.

Mark Bravo: "And now Bianca has to decide whether she has enough left to go back up."

Ace pounds the apron once.

Ace Andrews: "Get up!"

Bianca turns her head toward him.

Ace points toward Trey.

Then toward the top rope.

John Phillips: "Ace wants her to try again."

Bianca slowly pushes herself onto her knees.

Trey remains down.

She grabs the ropes.

Pulls herself upright.

Mark Bravo: "Bianca has hit Trey with almost everything tonight. She may not get many more chances."

Bianca begins climbing again.

One rope.

Two.

She reaches the top.

Trey starts moving.

John Phillips: "Trey Mack is getting up!"

Bianca sees him.

She changes plans.

Trey turns toward the corner—

Bianca leaps!

BLOCKBUSTER!

LAVISH LIFESTYLE CONNECTS!

John Phillips: "LAVISH LIFESTYLE!"

Trey crashes onto his back!

Bianca rolls through the landing.

She looks at Ace.

Ace immediately points upward again.

Mark Bravo: "Now!"

Bianca doesn't hesitate.

She climbs again.

Trey is down.

Motionless this time.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page may finally have him exactly where she needs him."

Bianca reaches the top rope.

She looks down at Trey Mack.

Then out at the Philadelphia crowd.

She smiles.

And launches herself into the air.

John Phillips: "PURE ELEGANCE!"

Bianca rotates through the corkscrew moonsault—

AND CONNECTS FLUSH!

Mark Bravo: "SHE GOT IT!"

Bianca immediately hooks both legs!

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

DING! DING! DING!

The referee signals immediately for the bell.

Bianca Page rolls off Trey Mack and onto her back, breathing heavily.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page has done it!"

Mark Bravo: "And she earned that one."

Ace Andrews throws both arms into the air at ringside.

The Philadelphia crowd rains down boos as Bianca slowly pushes herself up onto one elbow.

John Phillips: "Trey Mack had the size advantage. He had the power advantage. He had Bianca in trouble more than once."

Mark Bravo: "But Bianca kept changing the angle, kept making Trey miss, kept making him spend energy, and when she finally got that window, she hit Lavish Lifestyle and followed with Pure Elegance."

The ring announcer steps forward.

Ring Announcer: "Here is your winner... and advancing to the 2026 Ring King tournament... 'CLASSY' BIANCA PAGE!"

Ace Andrews climbs onto the apron.

The referee starts toward him, but Bianca waves him off.

Ace steps through the ropes and immediately raises Bianca's arm.

Bianca's exhaustion gives way to a broad, self-satisfied smile.

John Phillips: "That makes Bianca Page the eighth official entrant."

Mark Bravo: "And this is exactly the kind of win Platinum Society has been asking for."

John Phillips: "They've spent weeks complaining Bianca has been overlooked."

Mark Bravo: "Hard to overlook her now."

Bianca looks directly toward the hard camera.

Ace says something in her ear.

Bianca nods.

Then motions around her waist as if a championship is already there.

John Phillips: "And you can see exactly where her mind is."

Mark Bravo: "Ring King isn't just a trophy. It's a road to the UTA Championship."

Across the ring, Trey Mack begins to move.

He rolls onto his side.

Then pushes himself up to a seated position.

Bianca notices.

Her smile fades slightly.

John Phillips: "And Trey Mack knows just how close he came."

Trey sits against the bottom rope, staring toward Bianca.

Ace instinctively steps a little closer to her.

Mark Bravo: "This could get interesting."

Trey gets one knee underneath himself.

Then stands.

Bianca turns fully toward him.

The referee positions himself between them.

John Phillips: "Remember, these two aren't exactly known for sportsmanship."

Mark Bravo: "No kidding."

Trey looks at Bianca.

Then at Ace.

Then back at Bianca.

For several seconds, nobody moves.

Trey finally nods.

Trey Mack: "Aight."

Bianca raises an eyebrow.

Trey Mack: "You got me."

Bianca's smile slowly returns.

Trey points toward her.

Trey Mack: "But don't get comfortable."

He steps around the referee.

Ace moves forward.

Trey stops.

Looks at Ace.

Then laughs.

Trey Mack: "Man, relax."

Trey steps through the ropes and drops to the floor.

John Phillips: "Interesting reaction from Trey Mack."

Mark Bravo: "He's a heel, John, not an idiot. Bianca beat him tonight. Doesn't mean he has to like it."

Trey starts walking up the entranceway.

He stops halfway up.

Turns back toward the ring.

Bianca and Ace are still celebrating.

Trey shakes his head.

Then disappears through the curtain.

John Phillips: "Trey Mack's Road to the Throne ends tonight."

Mark Bravo: "But Bianca Page's is just beginning."

Inside the ring, Ace raises Bianca's arm again.

The large screen above the entranceway updates.

RING KING 2026

QUALIFIED

BIANCA PAGE

Bianca turns toward the screen.

She admires her name for a moment.

Then points at it.

And points back at herself.

John Phillips: "Seven automatic qualifiers became eight with Kirsty McKinney earlier."

Mark Bravo: "Now Bianca Page makes nine."

John Phillips: "And Platinum Society now has two guaranteed representatives in Ring King: Fighting Champion Samuel Scythe and Bianca Page."

Mark Bravo: "That's dangerous."

John Phillips: "Especially when you remember what Ace Andrews said before One Last Stop about Platinum Society being overlooked."

Mark Bravo: "They wanted opportunity. They got it. Bianca just cashed hers in."

Bianca finally steps through the ropes.

Ace follows her down the steel steps.

They begin walking toward the back together.

Bianca pauses near the bottom of the ramp and turns toward the camera.

She blows one final kiss.

Then mouths two words.

Bianca Page: "Pure elegance."

She turns and continues toward the curtain with Ace at her side.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page is going to Ring King."

Mark Bravo: "And somewhere in that bracket, somebody just got a much more expensive problem."

Against My Better Judgement

Segment

We cut backstage to the office of UTA General Manager Scott Stevens.

Stevens sits behind his desk.

Across from him sits Selina Santorino.

For someone who was sent home from One Last Stop after deliberately attacking another member of the roster...

Selina looks remarkably comfortable.

One leg crossed over the other.

Perfect posture.

Completely unbothered.

Scott Stevens looks considerably less relaxed.

Scott Stevens: "Do you have any idea how close I am to firing you?"

Selina raises an eyebrow.

Selina Santorino: "That's how we're starting?"

Scott Stevens: "That's exactly how we're starting."

Selina shrugs.

Selina Santorino: "Seems a little dramatic."

Stevens stares at her.

Scott Stevens: "Dramatic?"

Selina Santorino: "Very."

Scott leans forward.

Scott Stevens: "You attacked Susanita Ybanez minutes before she was scheduled to compete at One Last Stop."

Selina Santorino: "I remember."

Scott Stevens: "You threw her shoulder-first into steel."

Selina Santorino: "Also remember that."

Scott Stevens: "You injured her."

That gets the slightest reaction from Selina.

Scott Stevens: "Susanita has a shoulder injury because of you."

Selina uncrosses her legs.

Scott Stevens: "She's out."

A beat.

Selina Santorino: "For how long?"

Scott Stevens: "Long enough that I'm not giving you a timetable."

Selina considers that.

Selina Santorino: "Okay."

Scott's eyes narrow.

Scott Stevens: "Okay?"

Selina Santorino: "What do you want me to say?"

Selina spreads her hands.

Selina Santorino: "She had something I wanted."

Scott Stevens: "A match."

Selina Santorino: "Exactly."

Selina gestures toward herself.

Selina Santorino: "One of the biggest shows of the year and somehow you couldn't find room for your most influential star."

Scott Stevens: "So you assaulted somebody?"

Selina Santorino: "I told Melissa exactly what was going to happen."

Scott looks almost amazed by the answer.

Selina Santorino: "I said I'd make room."

A small smile.

Selina Santorino: "I made room."

Scott slowly rises from his chair.

Scott Stevens: "You know what, Selina?"

Selina looks up at him.

Scott Stevens: "I should fire you."

Selina's smile remains.

Scott Stevens: "I should've fired you in Toronto."

Scott Stevens: "You deliberately injured one of my wrestlers because you didn't like your spot on the card."

Scott Stevens: "I sent you home because if I'd let you stay in that building, I didn't know what else you were going to do."

Selina nods thoughtfully.

Selina Santorino: "And yet..."

She looks around the office.

Selina Santorino: "...here I am."

Scott's jaw tightens.

Selina Santorino: "Which means you're not firing me."

Silence.

Selina Santorino: "So can we skip the whole angry authority figure thing and get to the part where you tell me why I'm here?"

Scott looks at her for several seconds.

Scott Stevens: "You really do think you're untouchable, don't you?"

Selina smiles.

Selina Santorino: "No."

She stands.

Selina Santorino: "I'm simply better."

Scott closes his eyes for a moment.

He takes a breath through his nose.

Then sits back down.

Scott Stevens: "Against my better judgment..."

Selina's expression immediately brightens.

Scott Stevens: "...I'm giving you an opportunity."

Selina Santorino: "There we go."

Scott Stevens: "Don't."

Selina motions for him to continue.

Scott Stevens: "Next week."

Scott Stevens: "Ring King qualifying match."

Now Selina is listening.

Scott Stevens: "Selina Santorino..."

Pause.

Scott Stevens: "...versus Savior Hawkins."

Selina blinks.

Then smiles.

Selina Santorino: "That's it?"

Scott Stevens: "That's it?"

Selina Santorino: "You made it sound like there was going to be a punishment."

Scott Stevens: "This isn't a reward."

Selina Santorino: "It's a Ring King qualifier."

She shrugs.

Selina Santorino: "Sounds like a reward."

Scott Stevens: "It's your last chance."

That wipes a little of the smile away.

Scott Stevens: "You wanted a spot?"

Scott Stevens: "You've got one."

Scott Stevens: "But understand something."

Scott points toward her.

Scott Stevens: "You pull anything like what you pulled at One Last Stop again..."

Pause.

Scott Stevens: "...and there won't be another meeting in this office."

Scott Stevens: "There won't be another suspension."

Scott Stevens: "There won't be another warning."

Selina's eyes stay locked on him.

Scott Stevens: "You're gone."

Silence hangs between them.

Then Selina smiles again.

Selina Santorino: "Fine."

She turns toward the door.

Scott Stevens: "We're not finished."

Selina stops.

She looks back over her shoulder.

Scott Stevens: "Savior Hawkins isn't somebody you overlook."

Selina slowly turns back around.

Selina Santorino: "Scott."

She gives him an almost pitying smile.

Selina Santorino: "I'm not overlooking Savior Hawkins."

A beat.

Selina Santorino: "I'm looking past him."

Scott shakes his head.

Scott Stevens: "That's exactly the kind of attitude that's going to get you beat."

Selina Santorino: "No."

Selina reaches for the door.

Selina Santorino: "Next week Savior gets something millions of people would pay for."

She opens it.

Selina Santorino: "He gets to become content."

Selina steps into the hallway.

Then stops one final time.

Selina Santorino: "And when I'm finished..."

She looks back at Stevens.

Selina Santorino: "...I'm qualifying for Ring King."

That cocky smile returns.

Selina Santorino: "Then I'm winning the whole thing."

She gives him a dismissive little wave.

Selina Santorino: "Ciao."

Selina walks away.

Scott watches through the open doorway.

He slowly shakes his head.

Scott Stevens: "Against my better judgment..."

Scott returns to the paperwork on his desk as we fade out.

The Match is Set

Segment

The screen fades to black.

For a moment...

Nothing.

Then we hear it.

HONK.

A single mobility scooter horn.

The screen flickers to life.

Soft music begins underneath.

Something warm.

Almost nostalgic.

We see Bobby Dean.

Smiling.

The newly inducted UTA Hall of Famer proudly holding up his plaque.

Bobby Dean: "Hall of Fame, baby!"

Another quick shot.

Bobby flashing the ring on his finger to anyone who will look.

Bobby Dean: "You see the ring? Ohhh, that's nice."

Then...

Eric Dane Jr.

Standing beside him.

Smiling.

Back when everything between them still seemed harmless.

Back when Bobby thought he'd found a familiar connection.

A little piece of the past.

Something that reminded him of Eric's father.

Eric Dane Jr.: "How about at Victorious?"

Flash.

The old Hardcore Championship over Bobby's shoulder.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Bobby Dean..."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Eric Dane Jr..."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Hardcore Championship..."

Eric spreads his arms.

Eric Dane Jr.: "LADDER MATCH."

Bobby's face lights up.

Bobby Dean: "OH... MY... GOD!"

Bobby Dean: "I love it!"

The music lifts.

Fast cuts now.

Bobby on the scooter.

Eric walking beside him.

Bobby talking a mile a minute.

Eric tolerating him.

For a while...

It almost looked like friendship.

Then Victorious.

The music changes.

Slower.

More emotional.

A ladder stands in the middle of the ring.

Bobby Dean climbing.

Slowly.

Painfully.

One rung at a time.

The crowd beginning to believe.

John Phillips: "Nobody believed Bobby Dean could even make the climb!"

Bobby reaches the top.

Eric is there with him.

Two men trading punches high above the ring.

Then...

Eric's final right hand.

Bobby falls.

Eric takes the championship.

The footage slows.

Mark Bravo: "Everybody expected to laugh at Bobby Dean."

Bobby lying on the canvas.

Mark Bravo: "And instead..."

The crowd rises around him.

"BOB-BY!"

"BOB-BY!"

"BOB-BY!"

Mark Bravo: "...he made them believe."

Bobby gets to his feet.

His eyes wet.

Hand over his heart.

Bobby Dean: "Thank you."

Fade to black.

A few quiet piano notes.

Then another memory.

Bobby following Eric.

Trying to be helpful.

Trying to recreate the relationship he'd once had with Eric's father.

Bobby Dean: "I was just trying to help."

Eric's face fills the screen.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Then stop."

The music drops lower.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You are not here to recreate the greatest hits of whatever sad little arrangement you had with my father."

Bobby's smile is gone.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Until I need something from you..."

Eric steps closer.

Eric Dane Jr.: "...stay out of my way."

Quick cut.

Bobby standing alone.

Shirt half-tucked.

Trying to fix it.

Trying to understand what he did wrong.

The screen goes black again.

Then words appear.

THE JOKE.

Flash.

Bobby laughing awkwardly.

THE COMIC RELIEF.

Flash.

People laughing around him.

THE PUNCHLINE.

Then...

The UTA International Championship.

Resting across Bobby Dean's lap.

The music begins to build again.

Bobby gently polishing the center plate.

Bobby Dean: "Who's a shiny championship?"

He smiles.

Bobby Dean: "You are."

A lighter moment.

Then Eric appears.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I want to wrestle for it."

Bobby thinks.

Bobby Dean: "Usually people gotta beat somebody."

Eric's expression hardens.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I don't have to beat anybody."

Eric Dane Jr.: "I'm Eric Dane Jr."

Bobby looks at him.

Bobby Dean: "I know."

A beat.

Bobby Dean: "That's why I expected more."

The footage freezes on Eric's reaction.

Then cuts.

Mikey Unlikely enters the frame.

Eric Dane Jr.: "He doesn't deserve that championship."

Mikey's expression changes.

Mikey Unlikely: "Actually..."

He points toward Bobby.

Mikey Unlikely: "He earned it."

Bobby looks down at the championship.

The words echo.

Mikey Unlikely: "He earned it."

Again.

Mikey Unlikely: "He earned it."

The screen fades.

Then Eli Creed appears beside Bobby.

Quiet.

Calm.

Eli Creed: "Do you know what everyone else sees?"

Bobby gives that familiar nervous laugh.

Bobby Dean: "Unfortunately."

Bobby Dean: "The fat guy."

Bobby Dean: "The joke."

Bobby Dean: "The comic relief."

Eli looks directly into Bobby's eyes.

Eli Creed: "But not me."

Pause.

Eli Creed: "I see a champion."

The International Championship glimmers beneath the backstage lights.

Eli Creed: "Everyone else laughs because they're convinced this is the peak."

Bobby listens.

Eli Creed: "I see someone who still has chapters left to write."

Then the name.

Eli Creed: "Lindsey Lothario."

Cut to Bobby.

Thinking.

Looking down at the International Championship.

Then lifting it onto his shoulder.

Bobby Dean: "At One Last Stop..."

His voice becomes firmer.

Bobby Dean: "Bobby Dean defends the International Championship against Lindsey Lothario."

Pause.

Bobby Dean: "Let's see if everybody still thinks I'm a joke afterward."

The music swells.

One Last Stop.

Lindsey Lothario across the ring.

Bobby Dean gripping the International Championship before handing it away.

Then action.

Lindsey striking.

Bobby fighting back.

The unlikely champion refusing to quit.

Mikey Unlikely: "You're the International Champion, Bobby."

The earlier conversation plays underneath the match footage.

Mikey Unlikely: "Not because somebody forgot to pick it up."

Bobby survives another attack.

Mikey Unlikely: "Not because Scott Stevens made a paperwork mistake."

Bobby rallies.

Mikey Unlikely: "You earned it."

Bobby drives forward.

Mikey Unlikely: "So when Lindsey comes after you..."

The International Championship appears in a quick flash.

Mikey Unlikely: "...make them take it."

Bobby's voice echoes.

Bobby Dean: "Make them take it."

The match footage accelerates.

Lindsey.

Bobby.

Near falls.

Strikes.

Two people fighting for the championship.

Then everything changes.

Eric Dane Jr. appears at ringside.

The music distorts.

Slow motion.

Eric confronting Eli Creed.

Lindsey's attention pulled away.

The referee losing control.

The bell.

Lindsey wins.

But Bobby Dean remains International Champion.

The music stops.

Silence.

Bobby looks toward Eric.

Confused.

Not angry yet.

Just hurt.

The next images come slowly.

Eric talking.

Bobby listening.

Each word seeming heavier than the last.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You're Bobby Dean."

Cut.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Everybody laughs at you."

Cut.

Bobby looking down.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You're a joke."

Black screen.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You don't deserve that championship."

The words echo.

YOU DON'T DESERVE IT.

Again.

YOU DON'T DESERVE IT.

Again.

YOU DON'T DESERVE IT.

Then...

Bobby looks up.

Something has changed.

The sadness is still there.

But underneath it...

Anger.

Eric continues talking.

Talking down to him.

Dismissive.

Condescending.

Then—

CRACK!

Bobby Dean's fist connects with Eric Dane Jr.'s face.

The music SLAMS back in.

Eric hits the floor.

Bobby stands over him.

Shocked at first by what he just did.

Then breathing heavily.

International Championship still his.

The image freezes.

NO MORE.

Cut to black.

Then Mikey's voice.

Mikey Unlikely: "Nice right hand."

Bobby looks at his fist.

Bobby Dean: "It kinda hurts."

A brief smile from Mikey.

Mikey Unlikely: "Yeah, that's usually how punching people works."

The warmth returns for only a moment.

Bobby looks at his championship.

Still uncertain.

Still Bobby.

But different.

Bobby Dean: "He still might want my title."

Mikey puts an arm around Bobby.

Mikey Unlikely: "Of course he does!"

Mikey taps the International Championship.

Mikey Unlikely: "The question isn't whether he wants it."

The music begins building toward its final crescendo.

Mikey Unlikely: "The question is whether you finally understand that you earned it."

Bobby is quiet.

Bobby Dean: "I think I'm tryin'."

Black.

A heartbeat.

THUMP.

The Ring King logo slowly appears.

THUMP.

Then Eric Dane Jr.

Smug.

Confident.

Looking down at Bobby.

Eric Dane Jr.: "He's Bobby Dean."

THUMP.

Now Bobby.

International Championship over his shoulder.

No big smile.

No scooter horn.

Just staring ahead.

Mikey Unlikely: "He earned it."

THUMP.

Eric.

THUMP.

Bobby.

THUMP.

The punch from One Last Stop.

Eric crashing down.

The screen SHATTERS into the final graphic.

RING KING 2026

UTA INTERNATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

BOBBY DEAN

vs.

ERIC DANE JR.

SEPTEMBER 26, 2026

The music lowers.

One final piece of audio plays over the graphic.

Eric Dane Jr.: "He doesn't deserve that championship."

Pause.

Then Bobby's voice.

Bobby Dean: "Make me prove it."

Cut to black.

Reality Check

Segment

We cut backstage.

Melissa Cartwright stands in the interview area, microphone in hand.

Melissa Cartwright: "Ladies and gentlemen, joining me at this time... Eric Dane Junior."

Eric Dane Jr. steps into frame.

Sunglasses.

Expensive jacket.

That same impossible confidence he carries everywhere he goes.

But there is one small difference tonight.

Every few seconds...

Eric rubs his jaw.

The same jaw Bobby Dean punched at One Last Stop.

Melissa Cartwright: "Eric, I think the obvious place to start is One Last Stop."

Eric lowers his sunglasses slightly.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Obviously."

Melissa Cartwright: "Bobby Dean defended the International Championship against Lindsey Lothario."

Eric Dane Jr.: "You're already telling it wrong."

Melissa pauses.

Melissa Cartwright: "How so?"

Eric Dane Jr.: "Bobby Dean attempted to give away the International Championship to Lindsey Lothario."

Melissa looks at him.

Melissa Cartwright: "He was defending it."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Same thing."

Eric shrugs.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Bobby gets one little inspirational speech and suddenly he thinks he's fighting Rocky Balboa in Philadelphia."

A beat.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Except Bobby is the guy who eats Rocky Balboa."

Melissa doesn't react.

Eric Dane Jr.: "That was funny."

Melissa Cartwright: "Was it?"

Eric stares at her.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Moving on."

Melissa raises the microphone again.

Melissa Cartwright: "You came to ringside during that match."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Correct."

Melissa Cartwright: "You confronted Eli Creed."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Also correct."

Melissa Cartwright: "Lindsey became distracted, the referee lost control, and Lindsey ultimately won by disqualification."

Eric smiles.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You're welcome, Bobby."

Melissa blinks.

Melissa Cartwright: "You're taking credit for him retaining the championship?"

Eric Dane Jr.: "Of course I am."

Eric gestures toward himself.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Did Bobby leave Toronto with the International Championship?"

Melissa Cartwright: "Yes."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Was I there?"

Melissa Cartwright: "Yes."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Sounds pretty conclusive."

Melissa gives him a look.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Look, Bobby was in over his head."

Eric's tone becomes more serious.

Eric Dane Jr.: "That's what nobody wants to say because everybody's too busy doing this whole..."

Eric clasps both hands beneath his chin mockingly.

Eric Dane Jr.: "'Awwww, Bobby believes in himself now.'"

His hands drop.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Great."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Wonderful."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Put it on a Hallmark card."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Meanwhile, Lindsey Lothario was about three seconds away from walking out with the championship I have had my eye on for months."

Melissa Cartwright: "Your eye on?"

Eric Dane Jr.: "Melissa..."

Eric gives her an incredulous look.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I've had the guaranteed title shot."

Eric Dane Jr.: "My choice."

Eric Dane Jr.: "My timing."

Eric Dane Jr.: "My championship."

Melissa Cartwright: "Except you hadn't selected the International Championship yet."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Details."

Eric waves the point away.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I wasn't going to sit backstage and watch Bobby Dean hand my future to Lindsey Lothario because suddenly everybody decided Bobby needed a self-esteem month."

Melissa Cartwright: "So you interfered."

Eric Dane Jr.: "I protected an investment."

Eric smiles.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You're welcome again, Bobby."

Melissa Cartwright: "And afterward?"

The smile disappears.

Eric's hand rises toward his jaw again.

Melissa Cartwright: "You confronted Bobby."

Eric Dane Jr.: "I tried to educate Bobby."

Melissa Cartwright: "You called him a joke."

Eric Dane Jr.: "He is."

Melissa Cartwright: "You told him he didn't deserve the International Championship."

Eric Dane Jr.: "He doesn't."

Melissa Cartwright: "And Bobby punched you in the face."

Silence.

Eric stares at Melissa.

His tongue pushes against the inside of his cheek.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Yeah."

A humorless laugh.

Eric Dane Jr.: "He did."

Eric looks directly toward the camera.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Beautiful Bobby Dean punched Eric Dane Junior in the face."

He nods slowly.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Do you understand how insane that sentence is?"

Melissa Cartwright: "He seemed to think you'd pushed him too far."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Pushed him?"

Eric laughs.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Melissa, I've spent months trying to help this idiot."

Eric Dane Jr.: "I gave him attention when nobody else wanted him around."

Eric Dane Jr.: "I gave him opportunities."

Eric Dane Jr.: "I gave him a match at Victorious that people still talk about."

Eric Dane Jr.: "I let him stand beside me."

Eric taps himself in the chest.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Me."

Melissa raises an eyebrow.

Eric Dane Jr.: "That alone should be enough."

Melissa Cartwright: "Bobby might describe the last few months differently."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Bobby describes donuts like they're a food group."

Eric shrugs.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I'm not exactly worried about his perspective."

Melissa continues.

Melissa Cartwright: "But the punch clearly changed something."

Eric's expression becomes colder.

Eric Dane Jr.: "It clarified something."

A beat.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Bobby forgot his place."

The boos from the arena can faintly be heard through the backstage walls.

Eric Dane Jr.: "He got a championship."

Eric Dane Jr.: "People started chanting his name."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Mikey Unlikely tells him he's special."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Eli Creed tells him he's a champion."

Eric scoffs.

Eric Dane Jr.: "And suddenly Bobby Dean looks in the mirror and thinks he's somebody."

Melissa Cartwright: "He is the International Champion."

Eric slowly turns toward her.

Eric Dane Jr.: "For now."

Silence.

Melissa Cartwright: "Which brings us to Ring King."

Eric smiles again.

Melissa Cartwright: "After what happened at One Last Stop, you went directly to Scott Stevens and officially cashed in the guaranteed championship opportunity you earned after bringing the WrestleZone Championship back to UTA."

Eric nods.

Melissa Cartwright: "September twenty-sixth."

Melissa Cartwright: "Ring King."

Melissa Cartwright: "Bobby Dean versus Eric Dane Junior."

Melissa Cartwright: "International Championship."

Eric's grin widens.

Eric Dane Jr.: "See?"

Eric Dane Jr.: "Happy endings."

Melissa Cartwright: "For whom?"

Eric Dane Jr.: "Me."

Immediate.

Melissa almost expected nothing else.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You want to know what's funny?"

Eric moves closer to the camera.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Everyone is treating this like some big test for Bobby."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Can Bobby prove himself?"

Eric Dane Jr.: "Can Bobby show Eric Dane Junior he's not a joke?"

Eric Dane Jr.: "Can Bobby prove he deserves the International Championship?"

Eric shakes his head.

Eric Dane Jr.: "No."

Eric Dane Jr.: "He doesn't get to prove anything to me."

Eric points toward the lens.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I'm not the test."

Pause.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I'm the answer."

Melissa lets that sit.

Eric Dane Jr.: "And the answer is that Bobby Dean has been playing champion."

Eric Dane Jr.: "He's had his fun."

Eric Dane Jr.: "He's taken pictures."

Eric Dane Jr.: "He's gotten applause."

Eric Dane Jr.: "People have told him how proud they are."

Eric's voice turns condescending.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Good for Bobby."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Really."

He gives a tiny sarcastic clap.

Eric Dane Jr.: "We're all very proud."

The clapping stops.

Eric Dane Jr.: "September twenty-sixth, playtime ends."

Melissa Cartwright: "Bobby has already surprised you once."

Eric's eyes narrow.

Melissa Cartwright: "At Victorious, you expected him to be easy competition. He pushed you to the limit in that ladder match."

A flash of irritation.

Melissa Cartwright: "At One Last Stop, you talked down to him..."

She glances toward his jaw.

Melissa Cartwright: "...and he dropped you."

The crowd reacts faintly from inside the arena.

Eric slowly removes his sunglasses.

Eric Dane Jr.: "A punch."

He steps closer to Melissa.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Bobby Dean landed one punch."

Eric points toward his jaw.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Congratulations."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Put it in the Hall of Fame next to his plaque."

Eric turns toward the camera again.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Because here's the difference between punching me when I don't expect it..."

His expression sharpens.

Eric Dane Jr.: "...and wrestling me when I know you're coming."

Pause.

Eric Dane Jr.: "At Ring King, Bobby doesn't get surprise."

Eric Dane Jr.: "He doesn't get sympathy."

Eric Dane Jr.: "He doesn't get Mikey standing beside him telling him everything is gonna be okay."

Eric Dane Jr.: "He gets me."

Eric points toward himself.

Eric Dane Jr.: "And unlike everybody else around here..."

A smirk.

Eric Dane Jr.: "...I don't believe in Bobby Dean."

Melissa studies him.

Melissa Cartwright: "What happens if Bobby beats you?"

Eric stares at her.

Then laughs.

Really laughs.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Come on."

Melissa doesn't smile.

Melissa Cartwright: "It's a legitimate question."

Eric Dane Jr.: "No."

Eric puts his sunglasses back on.

Eric Dane Jr.: "It's adorable."

He starts to step away.

Melissa Cartwright: "Eric."

He stops.

Melissa Cartwright: "Bobby's message in the video we just saw was simple."

Eric looks back.

Melissa Cartwright: "You say he doesn't deserve the championship."

Melissa Cartwright: "He says..."

Pause.

Melissa Cartwright: "'Make me prove it.'"

Eric doesn't respond immediately.

He reaches up.

Touches his jaw one final time.

Then smiles.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Bobby..."

Eric turns directly toward the camera.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You don't have to prove anything."

His smile disappears.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I'm going to prove it for you."

A beat.

Eric Dane Jr.: "September twenty-sixth."

Eric Dane Jr.: "You bring my International Championship."

Eric points toward himself.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I'll bring the reality check."

He starts walking away.

Then stops after several steps.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Oh, and Bobby?"

Eric looks over his shoulder.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Enjoy the next two months."

A smug grin.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Pretending looks good on you."

Eric disappears down the hallway.

Melissa watches him leave.

Then turns back toward the camera.

Melissa Cartwright: "Eric Dane Junior versus Bobby Dean for the International Championship at Ring King."

She pauses.

Melissa Cartwright: "And if tonight is any indication, the physical fight may be the easiest part."

Fade out.

Clovis Black vs. Lindsey Lothario

Match

The camera returns to ringside as the Ring King graphic once again fills the video wall.

RING KING QUALIFYING MATCH

CLOVIS BLACK vs. LINDSEY LOTHARIO

John Phillips: "Two qualifiers down tonight, and we've already seen Kirsty McKinney and Bianca Page punch their tickets to the 2026 Ring King tournament."

Mark Bravo: "And now somebody else gets theirs."

John Phillips: "Clovis Black of The Empire against Lindsey Lothario of the Creed Method."

Mark Bravo: "This one is going to hurt."

The lights inside the Xfinity Mobile Arena begin to fade.

The noise from the Philadelphia crowd drops beneath the first heavy notes of Lindsey Lothario's music.

Then—

"Born This Way."

Not the bright, theatrical version once associated with Lindsey.

The heavier metal cover tears through the arena.

John Phillips: "And every time I hear this now, I can't help but think about how much has changed."

Mark Bravo: "Everything changed."

Red light begins pulsing across the stage.

No confetti.

No exaggerated posing.

No elaborate production designed to make sure every camera in the building finds the perfect angle.

Instead, Lindsey Lothario steps through the curtain.

Head lowered.

Shoulders squared.

Hands already taped for a fight.

And several steps behind them...

Eli Creed emerges.

John Phillips: "There was a time when Lindsey Lothario's entrance was almost as important to them as the match."

Mark Bravo: "Not anymore."

John Phillips: "And whether you approve of Eli Creed's methods or not, you cannot argue with the results."

Lindsey stops at the top of the entranceway.

For just a moment, their head turns toward the crowd.

There it is.

A tiny smirk.

A brief reminder of the person who once demanded every spotlight in the building.

Then it's gone.

Lindsey turns toward the ring.

Mark Bravo: "That's the part I find fascinating. Eli didn't erase Lindsey."

John Phillips: "Some would disagree with you."

Mark Bravo: "He didn't. Look closely. It's still there. The confidence is still there. The arrogance is definitely still there. But now it's controlled."

Eli steps beside Lindsey.

He says something quietly.

Lindsey nods once.

Then begins walking toward the ring.

John Phillips: "Lindsey Lothario came very close to leaving One Last Stop with the International Championship."

Mark Bravo: "They technically won the match."

John Phillips: "By disqualification. Bobby Dean retained the championship after everything broke down involving Eric Dane Junior, Eli Creed and Kairo Bey."

Mark Bravo: "Which means Lindsey walked away without the title they wanted."

John Phillips: "But tonight presents another opportunity."

Lindsey continues down the aisle.

Their eyes never leave the ring.

Eli follows behind at an almost leisurely pace.

He isn't shouting encouragement.

He isn't playing to the crowd.

He simply watches Lindsey.

John Phillips: "And Ring King could provide Lindsey with something considerably bigger."

Mark Bravo: "Win tonight. Get into the sixteen-person tournament. Win that tournament in September, and you're guaranteed a shot at the UTA Championship."

John Phillips: "And Lindsey has made it abundantly clear that they don't believe any championship in UTA should be beyond their reach."

A fan reaches over the barricade toward Lindsey.

Lindsey doesn't acknowledge them.

Another fan shouts something.

Lindsey keeps walking.

Mark Bravo: "Old Lindsey would've stopped three times by now."

John Phillips: "Probably posed twice."

Mark Bravo: "Minimum."

Lindsey reaches ringside.

They stop at the bottom of the steel steps.

Eli comes alongside them.

He places one hand gently against Lindsey's shoulder.

Lindsey turns their head slightly.

Eli leans close.

Eli Creed: "Discipline."

That's all.

Lindsey nods.

John Phillips: "One word."

Mark Bravo: "That's all Lindsey needed."

Lindsey climbs the steps.

They step onto the apron.

For a fraction of a second, Lindsey pauses.

The old instinct almost seems to take over.

The camera is directly in front of them.

The crowd behind them.

The perfect opportunity for the old pose.

Lindsey begins extending their arms—

Stops.

They glance toward Eli.

Eli says nothing.

He merely smiles.

Lindsey lowers their arms.

Then steps through the ropes.

John Phillips: "That's still strange to see."

Mark Bravo: "It's evolution."

John Phillips: "That's one word for it."

Lindsey walks directly toward the center of the ring.

They roll their shoulders.

Then bring both fists up into a compact guard.

A short shadowboxing combination follows.

Jab.

Elbow.

Knee.

Low kick.

Every movement tight.

Every movement deliberate.

John Phillips: "And that's another major difference in Lindsey Lothario since coming under Creed's influence."

Mark Bravo: "They've tightened everything up. Less wasted movement. More kicks. More knees. More elbows. Lindsey was always powerful, but now they're learning how to make every inch count."

Eli walks around ringside until he reaches Lindsey's corner.

Lindsey turns toward the entranceway.

John Phillips: "And they're going to need every bit of it tonight."

Mark Bravo: "Because Clovis Black is two hundred seventy-three pounds of bad intentions."

Lindsey's expression doesn't change.

John Phillips: "Six-foot-one, two hundred twenty-two pounds for Lindsey. They're not a small competitor by any stretch."

Mark Bravo: "But Clovis has fifty-one pounds on them, and unlike Trey Mack in our last match, Clovis isn't coming out here to have fun."

John Phillips: "No. Clovis Black doesn't have much fun doing anything."

Mark Bravo: "I've never seen that man have fun."

Lindsey backs into their corner.

Eli reaches through the ropes.

He holds out his hand.

Lindsey looks at it.

Then reaches toward their entrance jacket and removes it.

They hand it to Eli.

Eli carefully folds it over one arm.

John Phillips: "You know what makes this matchup particularly interesting? Lindsey and Clovis are both technically on the same side of the moral spectrum."

Mark Bravo: "There are no heroes here."

John Phillips: "The Creed Method against The Empire."

Mark Bravo: "And Clovis doesn't care about Lindsey's journey of self-discovery."

Lindsey begins bouncing lightly on their feet.

The guard comes back up.

Their eyes lock onto the entranceway.

Eli stands below them.

Calm.

Almost serene.

John Phillips: "Lindsey Lothario has transformed considerably over the last several months."

Mark Bravo: "Tonight we find out whether that transformation prepared them for a freight train."

Lindsey rolls their neck once.

The music begins to fade.

Then the arena falls into a low, uneasy hum.

Lindsey waits.

Eli waits.

And every eye inside the Xfinity Mobile Arena turns toward the entrance.

The arena remains dim.

Lindsey Lothario waits in the ring with their guard already raised.

Eli Creed stands outside their corner, calm and motionless.

Then a low bass-heavy beat begins to rumble through the Xfinity Mobile Arena.

Industrial.

Ominous.

Like machinery coming to life somewhere beneath the building.

John Phillips: "And here comes Clovis Black."

The lights drop another shade darker.

The bass continues to build.

Then—

A FREIGHT HORN BLARES through the arena.

The sound cuts through the building so sharply that even Lindsey's posture tightens for half a second.

Mark Bravo: "Every time I hear that, I feel like I'm standing on railroad tracks."

Through the shadows steps Clovis Black.

Hood up.

Sleeveless trench coat hanging from his massive frame.

Eyes locked straight ahead.

No Trey Mack.

No Marie Van Claudio.

No Empire backup of any kind.

Clovis Black walks alone.

John Phillips: "Clovis making this walk by himself, just as Trey Mack did earlier tonight."

Mark Bravo: "And I don't think Clovis minds."

John Phillips: "Not even slightly."

Clovis begins the slow walk down the aisle.

No posing.

No acknowledgment of the crowd.

No reaction to the boos coming from either side of the barricade.

He simply walks.

Like he's on his way to collect something that already belongs to him.

John Phillips: "Six-foot-two. Two hundred seventy-three pounds. And Clovis Black is one of those competitors whose size doesn't tell the whole story."

Mark Bravo: "Because he moves way faster than a man built like that should."

John Phillips: "Explosive speed, tremendous power, and very little wasted motion."

Mark Bravo: "That's the scary part. Trey Mack likes the show. Clovis Black doesn't."

The camera cuts to Lindsey.

They watch from the ring.

No smirk now.

No flourish.

Just focus.

Eli Creed leans slightly toward the apron.

Eli Creed: "Breathe."

Lindsey gives the faintest nod.

John Phillips: "And that's going to be important for Lindsey. They cannot get dragged into Clovis Black's pace."

Mark Bravo: "Exactly. Lindsey wants kicks. Elbows. Knees. They want to make Clovis reset over and over."

John Phillips: "Because if Clovis gets his hands around them—"

Mark Bravo: "—then all that discipline gets tested real quick."

Clovis reaches ringside.

He stops.

Looks up at Lindsey.

Lindsey stares back.

Neither one moves.

John Phillips: "And these two are already sizing one another up."

Mark Bravo: "This is a very different matchup than Trey Mack and Bianca Page."

John Phillips: "Absolutely. Lindsey is giving up weight, but they're not giving up nearly as much size as Bianca did."

Mark Bravo: "And Lindsey has enough power to make Clovis respect them."

Clovis walks toward the steel steps.

He climbs them slowly.

One step.

Then another.

He reaches the apron.

Lindsey takes two steps forward from their corner.

The referee immediately motions them back.

Lindsey obeys.

Barely.

John Phillips: "Lindsey clearly not intimidated."

Mark Bravo: "They better not be. Fear doesn't help you against Clovis. It just makes you freeze faster."

Clovis steps through the ropes.

He walks directly toward the center of the ring.

Then reaches up.

Pulls the hood back.

Sheds the sleeveless trench coat in one quick motion.

And hands it through the ropes without ever looking away from Lindsey.

John Phillips: "All business."

Mark Bravo: "Always."

Clovis rolls one shoulder.

Then the other.

He flexes his fingers once.

That's the entire warmup.

Across the ring, Lindsey bounces lightly on their feet.

Clovis does not bounce.

He just stands there.

John Phillips: "We saw Clovis Black challenge Samuel Scythe for the Fighting Championship in South Africa."

Mark Bravo: "And even in defeat, Clovis showed exactly what kind of problem he is. You don't have to like him to understand the violence he brings."

John Phillips: "Now he gets another major opportunity. Win tonight and he joins Ring King."

Mark Bravo: "And remember what Trey said earlier. The Empire wants numbers in that tournament."

The camera tightens on Clovis.

Cold stare.

Jaw set.

No expression whatsoever.

John Phillips: "Trey Mack failed to qualify earlier tonight."

Mark Bravo: "Which makes this one even more important for The Empire."

John Phillips: "Clovis Black can make sure they still put someone into the field tonight."

Clovis begins walking toward Lindsey.

The referee immediately steps between them.

Clovis stops.

Lindsey doesn't back away.

The two stare around the referee's shoulders at one another.

Mark Bravo: "And I don't think either one of them likes being told to wait."

Eli Creed watches from ringside.

His expression remains perfectly calm.

Clovis briefly looks toward him.

Eli smiles.

Clovis looks back at Lindsey.

John Phillips: "Eli Creed is going to be another factor here."

Mark Bravo: "But Lindsey is going to have to do the actual work."

John Phillips: "And Clovis Black has no problem making that work miserable."

The referee sends Clovis toward his corner.

Clovis backs away slowly.

Never breaking eye contact.

Lindsey returns to their own corner.

Eli reaches up toward them.

He doesn't touch Lindsey.

He simply raises two fingers toward his own eyes.

Then points toward Clovis.

Lindsey nods.

John Phillips: "The Creed Method against The Empire."

Mark Bravo: "Two heels. Two very different philosophies."

John Phillips: "Lindsey Lothario has been rebuilt around discipline."

Mark Bravo: "Clovis Black was built around hurting people."

The referee looks toward both corners.

Lindsey raises their guard.

Clovis leans slightly forward.

His weight shifts onto the balls of his feet.

John Phillips: "One of these two is headed to Ring King."

Mark Bravo: "And I wouldn't want to be standing between them when we find out who."

The referee signals toward the timekeeper.

DING! DING! DING!

John Phillips: "And here we go!"

Lindsey Lothario immediately brings both hands up into a compact guard.

Clovis Black takes one step forward.

Then another.

Lindsey circles.

Mark Bravo: "This is where Lindsey's transformation really matters."

John Phillips: "They've incorporated a tremendous amount of Muay Thai into their offense."

Mark Bravo: "And against Clovis Black, that's not just style. That's survival. Low kicks. Knees. Elbows. Clinch control. Make the big man pay every time he gets close."

Clovis reaches forward.

Lindsey immediately kicks the outside of his lead thigh!

THWACK!

Clovis stops.

Looks down at the leg.

Then back at Lindsey.

John Phillips: "First low kick lands clean."

Clovis steps forward again.

Lindsey throws another!

THWACK!

Clovis absorbs it.

Mark Bravo: "And Lindsey isn't trying to knock him out with one kick. They're investing."

John Phillips: "Take away the base."

Mark Bravo: "Exactly."

Clovis lunges.

Lindsey slides outside his reach.

Another kick to the thigh!

Clovis turns quickly—

Lindsey fires a jab!

Another!

Then a sharp elbow across the cheek!

John Phillips: "Elbow lands!"

Clovis takes half a step backward.

Lindsey immediately resets their guard.

Mark Bravo: "That's the new Lindsey. Old Lindsey would've posed after that."

John Phillips: "Now they're right back in position."

Eli Creed watches from ringside.

He gives a slow nod.

Eli Creed: "Again."

Lindsey moves forward.

Low kick—

CLOVIS CATCHES IT!

John Phillips: "Got the leg!"

Lindsey immediately hops on one foot.

Clovis pulls them toward him—

Lindsey jumps!

ENZUIGIRI!

The free leg catches Clovis behind the ear!

Clovis releases them and staggers sideways.

Mark Bravo: "Great recovery!"

Lindsey lands and immediately charges.

RUNNING KNEE!

Clovis catches it against the chest and stumbles backward into the ropes!

John Phillips: "Lindsey has Clovis backing up!"

Lindsey closes the distance.

They grab behind Clovis' head.

MUAY THAI CLINCH!

Mark Bravo: "There it is!"

KNEE TO THE BODY!

Another!

A third!

Clovis folds slightly.

John Phillips: "Lindsey driving those knees into the ribs!"

Lindsey pulls Clovis' head down—

KNEE TOWARD THE FACE!

Clovis blocks it with both forearms!

Then shoves Lindsey away with tremendous force!

Lindsey sails backward and hits the canvas!

John Phillips: "And there's the power!"

Mark Bravo: "That's the problem. Lindsey can technically win an exchange and still get thrown across the ring at the end of it."

Lindsey rolls through and gets back to their feet quickly.

Clovis charges.

RUNNING BODY BLOCK!

Lindsey is absolutely flattened!

John Phillips: "GOOD LORD!"

Lindsey rolls onto their side, clutching their ribs.

Mark Bravo: "And that's two hundred seventy-three pounds moving fast."

Clovis doesn't celebrate.

He walks directly toward Lindsey.

Grabs them around the waist.

And deadlifts them off the canvas!

John Phillips: "Look at this!"

DEADLIFT GERMAN SUPLEX!

Lindsey crashes hard across their shoulders!

Mark Bravo: "That'll rearrange your philosophy."

Clovis bridges into a cover!

ONE!

TWO!

LINDSEY KICKS OUT!

John Phillips: "Two!"

Clovis immediately sits up.

No frustration.

No surprise.

He simply reaches down and drags Lindsey back up.

John Phillips: "And Clovis Black doesn't waste motion."

Mark Bravo: "Nope. He doesn't care whether you kicked out. He just starts breaking something else."

Clovis drives a forearm into Lindsey's back.

THUD!

Lindsey drops to one knee.

Another forearm!

Lindsey nearly goes flat.

John Phillips: "Clovis targeting the back now."

Clovis pulls Lindsey upright.

OVERHEAD BELLY-TO-BELLY SUPLEX!

Lindsey flies across the ring!

Mark Bravo: "And Lindsey isn't small! That's what makes that impressive."

Lindsey rolls toward the ropes.

Eli Creed approaches their position.

He doesn't reach in.

He doesn't touch them.

Eli Creed: "Breathe through it."

Lindsey takes a breath.

Then another.

John Phillips: "Creed coaching them from the floor."

Clovis charges toward Lindsey at the ropes.

BIG BOOT—

LINDSEY DUCKS!

Clovis' leg goes over the top rope!

Lindsey immediately kicks the standing leg!

Clovis drops awkwardly against the ropes.

Mark Bravo: "Back to the leg!"

Lindsey steps in.

ELBOW TO THE JAW!

Clovis rocks backward.

Another elbow!

Another!

John Phillips: "Lindsey opening up with the elbows!"

Clovis throws a wild right hand.

Lindsey ducks.

They step inside.

Another clinch!

KNEE TO THE BODY!

KNEE!

KNEE!

Mark Bravo: "They're forcing Clovis to fight at short range now!"

Clovis tries to shove them away.

Lindsey holds the clinch.

They twist their hips.

And drive another knee into the ribs!

John Phillips: "Lindsey is doing damage!"

Clovis finally wraps both arms around Lindsey's waist.

Mark Bravo: "Uh-oh."

He lifts them completely off the canvas!

Lindsey immediately starts firing short elbows down onto his head!

One!

Two!

Three!

Clovis keeps holding them!

John Phillips: "Lindsey trying to fight out!"

Clovis charges forward—

AND DRIVES LINDSEY BACK-FIRST INTO THE TURNBUCKLES!

John Phillips: "OH!"

The air leaves Lindsey's lungs.

Clovis takes two steps backward.

Then charges—

CORNER AVALANCHE!

Clovis crushes Lindsey against the turnbuckles!

Mark Bravo: "That's fifty-one extra pounds making itself known!"

Lindsey slumps forward.

Clovis catches them.

Pulls them out of the corner.

BLACKOUT SLAM!

The Black Hole Slam drives Lindsey into the mat!

John Phillips: "BLACKOUT SLAM!"

Clovis covers!

ONE!

TWO!

LINDSEY GETS THE SHOULDER UP!

John Phillips: "Lindsey survives!"

Clovis looks at the referee.

The referee holds up two fingers.

Clovis stands.

He steps toward the referee.

The referee backs up slightly.

Mark Bravo: "Clovis doesn't like being told things."

John Phillips: "It was two."

Clovis stares at the referee for several seconds.

Then turns back toward Lindsey.

Eli Creed watches from the floor.

He smiles faintly.

John Phillips: "And Creed looks almost pleased."

Mark Bravo: "Because Lindsey is being tested."

John Phillips: "That's a disturbing way to look at someone getting thrown around by Clovis Black."

Mark Bravo: "That's Eli Creed."

Clovis reaches down.

He grabs Lindsey by the wrist.

Pulls them to their feet.

Then yanks them violently toward him—

SHORT-ARM LARIAT—

LINDSEY DUCKS!

Clovis spins around.

LOW KICK!

Clovis' leg buckles!

Lindsey fires another!

THWACK!

John Phillips: "Back to the leg!"

Clovis swings.

Lindsey slips inside.

ELBOW!

Another elbow!

A third!

Clovis stumbles backward!

Mark Bravo: "And now Clovis is getting chopped apart in close!"

Lindsey grabs the back of his head.

KNEE!

Clovis absorbs it.

Another knee!

Clovis drops to one knee!

John Phillips: "Clovis Black is down!"

Lindsey steps backward.

Measures him.

Then charges—

RUNNING KNEE TO THE FACE!

Clovis goes down!

John Phillips: "LINDSEY DROPS HIM!"

Lindsey immediately covers!

ONE!

TWO!

CLOVIS POWERS OUT!

Mark Bravo: "And Clovis still has plenty left!"

Lindsey rolls off him.

They immediately get back to their feet.

John Phillips: "No frustration from Lindsey."

Mark Bravo: "That's Creed Method discipline."

Lindsey raises their guard again.

Clovis gets to one knee.

Lindsey kicks the thigh.

Clovis grimaces.

Another kick.

Clovis reaches for them.

Lindsey circles out.

John Phillips: "And Lindsey is forcing Clovis to turn on that damaged leg."

Clovis suddenly explodes forward!

BIG BOOT!

IT CONNECTS!

Lindsey flips backward onto the canvas!

John Phillips: "What a shot!"

Mark Bravo: "That's why you cannot relax!"

Clovis grabs Lindsey immediately.

He lifts them—

DEADLIFT GERMAN SUPLEX!

But Lindsey lands on their feet!

John Phillips: "LINDSEY LANDS!"

Clovis turns around—

CURTAIN CALL!

SUPERKICK!

Clovis staggers backward!

Mark Bravo: "Caught him clean!"

Lindsey hits the ropes.

Clovis recovers—

STANDING OVATION!

SPINNING WHEEL KICK!

Clovis goes down!

John Phillips: "Lindsey Lothario is stringing offense together now!"

Lindsey gets back up.

They look toward Eli.

Eli holds up one finger.

Eli Creed: "Control."

Lindsey nods.

John Phillips: "Creed doesn't want them chasing the finish."

Mark Bravo: "Not yet."

Clovis rolls onto his stomach.

Lindsey steps toward him.

They kick the damaged thigh again.

Clovis grunts.

Lindsey circles.

Another low kick.

John Phillips: "Lindsey is systematically taking away Clovis Black's base."

Clovis gets back to his feet.

He lunges.

Lindsey sidesteps.

Clovis stumbles into the ropes.

Lindsey grabs him from behind.

Clovis immediately throws an elbow backward.

Lindsey ducks.

They spin Clovis around.

KNEE TO THE BODY!

Clovis doubles over.

Lindsey grabs the clinch again.

KNEE!

KNEE!

ELBOW!

John Phillips: "Lindsey pouring it on!"

Clovis shoves them away.

Lindsey rebounds off the ropes.

Clovis steps forward—

LINDSEY LEAPS!

RUNNING CROSSBODY!

They collide!

Clovis stays standing for a moment—

Then falls backward!

Mark Bravo: "They finally knocked the locomotive off the tracks!"

Lindsey rolls through.

They get back to their knees.

Clovis is down.

But already beginning to move.

John Phillips: "Neither competitor has been able to completely take control."

Mark Bravo: "And that's what makes this good. Clovis can end any exchange with one slam. Lindsey can dissect him piece by piece if they're given space."

Lindsey gets back to their feet.

Clovis rises on the opposite side.

They stare at one another.

Both breathing harder now.

Eli Creed watches silently from ringside.

John Phillips: "And we may only now be getting to the real fight."

Lindsey gets back to their feet.

Clovis rises on the opposite side.

They stare at one another.

Both breathing harder now.

Eli Creed watches silently from ringside.

John Phillips: "And we may only now be getting to the real fight."

Clovis steps forward first.

Lindsey meets him.

Clovis throws a forearm.

Lindsey blocks with both arms.

They answer with a sharp elbow to the jaw!

John Phillips: "Lindsey lands clean!"

Clovis fires another forearm.

Lindsey slips to the outside.

LOW KICK!

Clovis' leg buckles again.

Mark Bravo: "That leg is becoming a real problem."

Lindsey steps in.

Another elbow!

Then a short knee to the ribs!

Clovis reaches for them—

Lindsey pivots away.

John Phillips: "Lothario staying just outside of Clovis' grasp."

Mark Bravo: "That's the whole match right there. Lindsey wants to hurt Clovis without ever staying in the same place

long enough for him to grab them."

Clovis charges suddenly.

Lindsey sidesteps.

Clovis hits the ropes.

He rebounds with shocking speed—

RUNNING BODY BLOCK!

It catches Lindsey square in the chest!

John Phillips: "And just like that!"

Lindsey flies backward and crashes to the canvas.

Mark Bravo: "You can win six exchanges against Clovis Black and lose the seventh by getting hit by a refrigerator."

Clovis drops across Lindsey.

ONE!

TWO!

LINDSEY KICKS OUT!

John Phillips: "Still only two."

Clovis doesn't waste time arguing.

He grabs Lindsey by the wrist.

Pulls them up.

Then yanks them violently toward him—

SHORT-ARM LARIAT!

THE WHISTLE CONNECTS!

Lindsey flips inside out!

John Phillips: "THE WHISTLE!"

Mark Bravo: "That's the setup!"

Clovis stands over Lindsey.

He reaches down.

Pulls them upright.

John Phillips: "Clovis could be looking for Freight Line!"

Lindsey's legs are barely underneath them.

Clovis positions himself—

Eli Creed steps closer to the apron.

He does not climb up.

He does not touch anyone.

Eli Creed: "See it."

Lindsey's eyes sharpen.

Clovis goes to finish—

LINDSEY DROPS THEIR WEIGHT!

John Phillips: "Blocked!"

Clovis tries again.

Lindsey drives an elbow backward into the side of his head!

Another!

Another!

Clovis' grip loosens.

Lindsey spins free!

Mark Bravo: "They got out!"

Clovis turns—

CURTAIN CALL!

SUPERKICK!

Clovis staggers but stays standing!

John Phillips: "And still Clovis won't go down!"

Lindsey immediately fires a second low kick!

Clovis drops to one knee.

Lindsey moves in—

ELBOW TO THE TEMPLE!

Clovis slumps sideways.

Mark Bravo: "That's the accumulation!"

Lindsey grabs the back of his head.

KNEE!

Another knee!

A THIRD!

Clovis drops to both knees!

John Phillips: "Lindsey has him hurt!"

Lindsey backs away.

They measure Clovis.

Then charge—

RUNNING KNEE!

Clovis falls backward!

Lindsey dives into the cover!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—CLOVIS KICKS OUT!

John Phillips: "No! Clovis Black survives!"

Lindsey sits up.

Their chest rises and falls rapidly.

Eli remains calm.

Eli Creed: "Again."

Mark Bravo: "Creed doesn't want Lindsey thinking about the near fall."

John Phillips: "And Lindsey isn't."

Lindsey rises.

Clovis gets onto all fours.

Lindsey kicks the damaged thigh again.

Clovis grimaces.

Another kick.

Clovis turns toward them angrily.

Lindsey fires a third—

CLOVIS CATCHES IT!

John Phillips: "Caught!"

Clovis rises while holding the leg.

Lindsey hops.

Then jumps—

ENZUIGIRI—

CLOVIS DUCKS!

Lindsey crashes to the mat!

Mark Bravo: "He learned!"

Clovis keeps hold of the ankle.

He drags Lindsey toward him.

Then lifts them from the canvas with raw strength!

SECOND-ROPE POWERSLAM POSITION—

John Phillips: "Oh no."

Clovis carries Lindsey toward the corner.

He steps onto the second rope.

Mark Bravo: "This could end it."

Lindsey starts driving elbows into the side of his head.

One!

Two!

Three!

Clovis wobbles.

John Phillips: "Lindsey fighting desperately!"

Another elbow!

Clovis finally loses his grip.

Lindsey drops to the apron!

Clovis remains perched on the second rope.

Lindsey grabs the top rope.

They swing one leg upward—

ROUNDHOUSE KICK TO THE HEAD!

Clovis topples from the second rope and crashes onto the mat!

John Phillips: "WHAT A COUNTER!"

Lindsey steps back through the ropes.

Clovis begins pushing himself up.

Lindsey hits the ropes.

Clovis rises—

STANDING OVATION!

SPINNING WHEEL KICK!

Clovis falls again!

Mark Bravo: "Lindsey is starting to overwhelm him!"

Lindsey gets right back up.

No pose.

No smile.

They wait.

John Phillips: "And this is the biggest difference in Lindsey Lothario. Old Lindsey might have taken a second to enjoy that."

Mark Bravo: "This Lindsey is hunting."

Clovis crawls toward the ropes.

Lindsey approaches.

Clovis suddenly grabs them around the waist!

John Phillips: "Clovis still has them!"

He explodes upward—

DEADLIFT GERMAN!

Lindsey flips through!

LANDS ON THEIR FEET!

John Phillips: "AGAIN!"

Clovis turns around.

Lindsey rushes him—

CLOVIS CATCHES THEM!

BLACKOUT SLAM!

LINDSEY IS DRIVEN INTO THE MAT!

John Phillips: "BLACKOUT SLAM!"

Clovis hooks the leg!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—LINDSEY KICKS OUT!

John Phillips: "LINDSEY SURVIVES!"

Mark Bravo: "That was close!"

Clovis sits upright.

For the first time, visible frustration appears.

He stares toward the referee.

The referee confirms two.

Clovis stands and steps toward him.

John Phillips: "Clovis Black needs to be careful."

The referee warns him.

Clovis stares.

Then slowly turns back toward Lindsey.

Eli Creed is crouched outside the ropes near them.

Eli Creed: "Pain is information."

Lindsey opens their eyes.

Eli Creed: "Use it."

Lindsey begins pushing themselves up.

Mark Bravo: "I don't know what that means."

John Phillips: "Lindsey apparently does."

Clovis grabs Lindsey by the back of the neck.

Pulls them upright.

Lindsey suddenly snaps a short elbow into his ribs!

Another!

Clovis clubs them across the back!

Lindsey drops to a knee.

Clovis grabs the wrist.

Yanks Lindsey toward him—

THE WHISTLE—

LINDSEY DUCKS!

Clovis spins through!

Lindsey grabs the clinch!

KNEE TO THE FACE!

Clovis reels backward!

Lindsey maintains the clinch.

ANOTHER KNEE!

Clovis drops to one knee!

John Phillips: "Lindsey is breaking him down again!"

Lindsey releases.

They spin—

DISCUS LARIAT!

CENTER STAGE!

Clovis is knocked flat!

Mark Bravo: "CENTER STAGE!"

Lindsey looks down at him.

Then toward Eli.

Eli slowly nods.

John Phillips: "That is usually the setup."

Mark Bravo: "And now Lindsey may be looking for Final Bow."

Lindsey bends down.

They grab Clovis.

They try to pull him up—

Clovis suddenly drives forward!

He tackles Lindsey backward into the corner!

John Phillips: "Clovis still fighting!"

Clovis drives his shoulder into Lindsey's stomach.

Once!

Twice!

Three times!

Mark Bravo: "Lindsey got too close!"

Clovis backs away.

Then charges—

CORNER AVALANCHE!

LINDSEY MOVES!

Clovis crashes into the turnbuckles!

He staggers backward.

Lindsey steps behind him.

LOW KICK TO THE DAMAGED LEG!

Clovis drops to one knee!

John Phillips: "The leg gives out!"

Lindsey steps in front.

Clovis looks up.

Lindsey fires a brutal elbow across the jaw!

Clovis slumps.

Lindsey grabs him around the head and arm.

Mark Bravo: "What's Lindsey thinking here?"

Clovis tries to rise.

Lindsey keeps him bent.

Then drives another knee upward into the face!

Clovis drops flat.

John Phillips: "Clovis Black may be out!"

Lindsey stands over him.

Breathing heavily.

They look toward the ropes.

Then toward Eli.

Eli raises one hand.

Slowly closes it into a fist.

Mark Bravo: "Creed is telling them to finish it."

Lindsey reaches down for Clovis.

Lindsey reaches down for Clovis.

They grab him by the head and start pulling him upright.

John Phillips: "Lindsey knows they can't give Clovis Black time to recover."

Mark Bravo: "Not after everything it took to finally get him down."

Clovis reaches one knee.

Then suddenly drives a forearm into Lindsey's ribs!

Lindsey folds.

John Phillips: "Clovis still has something left!"

Another forearm!

Lindsey staggers backward.

Clovis gets to his feet.

Favoring the damaged leg.

But standing.

Mark Bravo: "That leg is hurting him, but Clovis is still Clovis."

Lindsey brings the guard up again.

Clovis charges—

Lindsey slips outside!

LOW KICK!

Clovis' leg buckles!

Lindsey immediately steps in—

ELBOW!

Clovis staggers.

Another elbow!

And a knee to the body!

John Phillips: "Lindsey right back to the combination work!"

Clovis swings wildly.

Lindsey ducks.

MUAY THAI CLINCH!

KNEE!

Another!

A third!

Mark Bravo: "This is where Lindsey is most dangerous now. Short range, tight control, no wasted movement."

Clovis powers forward.

He drives Lindsey backward into the ropes.

The referee calls for a break.

ONE!

TWO!

Clovis releases.

Then immediately blasts Lindsey with a forearm!

John Phillips: "Cheap shot on the break!"

Mark Bravo: "Legal enough."

Lindsey reels backward into the ropes.

Clovis hits the opposite side.

He rebounds—

BIG BOOT!

LINDSEY DUCKS!

Clovis turns—

CURTAIN CALL!

SUPERKICK TO THE JAW!

Clovis stumbles backward!

John Phillips: "Curtain Call lands flush!"

Lindsey charges—

RUNNING KNEE!

Clovis catches it!

Mark Bravo: "No!"

Clovis lifts Lindsey high!

BLACKOUT SLAM—

LINDSEY COUNTERS MID-MOTION!

They twist around!

DDT!

Clovis gets spiked into the canvas!

John Phillips: "WHAT A COUNTER!"

Lindsey rolls through.

They get back to their knees.

Clovis is down.

Eli Creed takes one slow step closer to the apron.

Eli Creed: "Now."

Lindsey rises.

They pull Clovis upright.

Clovis is barely steady.

Lindsey spins—

CENTER STAGE!

THE DISCUS LARIAT CONNECTS AGAIN!

Clovis collapses!

John Phillips: "CENTER STAGE FOR THE SECOND TIME!"

Mark Bravo: "And Clovis is not getting back up quickly!"

Lindsey doesn't cover.

They reach down.

Grab Clovis around the waist.

And start pulling him up.

John Phillips: "They want Final Bow."

Clovis fights the lift.

He plants his feet.

Lindsey tries again.

Nothing.

Mark Bravo: "That's two hundred seventy-three pounds."

Clovis suddenly drives upward.

BACK BODY DROP!

Lindsey flies over and lands hard!

John Phillips: "Clovis blocks it!"

Lindsey rolls through the landing and gets to one knee.

Clovis turns.

He charges—

FREIGHT LINE!

LINDSEY MOVES AT THE LAST SECOND!

John Phillips: "MISSED!"

Clovis crashes awkwardly toward the ropes.

His damaged leg gives out underneath him!

He drops to one knee.

Mark Bravo: "The leg!"

Lindsey immediately kicks it again!

Clovis drops lower.

Lindsey grabs the clinch.

KNEE TO THE FACE!

Another!

Another!

Clovis slumps against Lindsey.

John Phillips: "Clovis Black is barely defending himself now!"

The referee moves closer.

Lindsey releases the clinch.

Clovis stays on his knees.

Lindsey steps backward.

Breathes.

Measures him.

Then fires one brutal elbow across the temple!

Clovis falls onto his side.

Mark Bravo: "That might have shut the lights off."

Lindsey looks toward Eli.

Eli slowly nods.

Lindsey grabs Clovis.

They pull him up one more time.

Clovis offers almost no resistance.

John Phillips: "Now Lindsey may finally have the opening."

Lindsey gets underneath him.

They strain.

Clovis rises.

Higher.

And Lindsey gets him up!

Mark Bravo: "THEY GOT HIM!"

Lindsey pauses for only a fraction of a second—

Then drives Clovis down with the sit-out powerbomb!

FINAL BOW!

Clovis is folded into the canvas!

John Phillips: "FINAL BOW!"

Lindsey stays seated and hooks both legs!

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

DING! DING! DING!

Lindsey immediately releases the legs and falls backward onto the canvas.

For several seconds, they simply lie there.

Chest heaving.

Eyes closed.

John Phillips: "LINDSEY LOTHARIO IS GOING TO RING KING!"

Mark Bravo: "What a fight!"

The referee moves toward Lindsey and reaches for their wrist.

Lindsey slowly sits up.

The Philadelphia crowd reacts as the referee raises their arm.

Ring Announcer: "Here is your winner... and advancing to the 2026 Ring King tournament... LINDSEY... LOTHARIO!"

John Phillips: "And that was anything but easy."

Mark Bravo: "That's the kind of match that tells you something about somebody."

Lindsey remains seated as the referee releases their arm.

Across the ring, Clovis Black lies flat on his back.

Eli Creed walks toward the steel steps.

John Phillips: "Clovis Black had Lindsey in serious trouble more than once. The Blackout Slam nearly ended it. The Whistle nearly set up Freight Line. Every time Clovis got his hands on Lindsey, he changed the complexion of this match."

Mark Bravo: "But look at how Lindsey won."

Lindsey gets onto one knee.

Mark Bravo: "They didn't overpower Clovis for twenty minutes. They didn't pretend the fifty-pound difference wasn't

there. They attacked the leg. They worked the body. They used those elbows and knees. They made Clovis carry that damage until he couldn't explode the same way anymore."

John Phillips: "And only then could Lindsey get all two hundred seventy-three pounds of Clovis Black up for Final Bow."

Eli steps through the ropes.

He approaches Lindsey.

Lindsey looks up at him.

For a moment, Eli says nothing.

Then he extends his hand.

Lindsey takes it.

Eli pulls them to their feet.

John Phillips: "You can see the toll this one took."

Lindsey immediately grabs at their lower back.

Eli notices.

He says something quietly.

Lindsey shakes their head.

They're fine.

Or at least they're going to pretend to be.

Mark Bravo: "They'll hurt tomorrow."

John Phillips: "They may hurt for a week."

Mark Bravo: "Doesn't matter. Their name is in the tournament."

The video wall above the entranceway changes.

RING KING 2026

QUALIFIED

LINDSEY LOTHARIO

Lindsey looks toward it.

The exhaustion disappears from their face for just a moment.

That familiar smirk returns.

John Phillips: "There it is."

Mark Bravo: "What?"

John Phillips: "A little bit of the old Lindsey."

Lindsey takes a step toward the ropes and looks out at the crowd.

They start to spread their arms.

This time...

They don't stop.

Lindsey throws their arms wide.

Head tilted back.

Soaking in the moment.

Mark Bravo: "Maybe Creed didn't get rid of everything."

Eli watches from behind them.

There is the slightest smile on his face.

John Phillips: "And interestingly enough, Creed isn't stopping it."

Mark Bravo: "Why would he? Lindsey earned this one."

Lindsey lowers their arms.

They turn toward Eli.

Eli steps closer.

Eli Creed: "Better."

Lindsey's smirk grows.

Lindsey Lothario: "I know."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. They're still in there."

Behind them, Clovis Black begins sitting up.

The referee notices and moves toward him.

Clovis waves him away.

John Phillips: "And now Clovis Black is coming around."

Clovis sits against the bottom turnbuckle.

He looks toward Lindsey.

Lindsey notices.

The smile disappears.

Eli turns as well.

Mark Bravo: "Careful."

Clovis reaches for the ropes.

Pulls himself upright.

He is still favoring the leg Lindsey spent the match attacking.

But he stands.

Lindsey raises their hands again.

Ready.

Clovis takes one step forward.

Eli moves beside Lindsey.

John Phillips: "This doesn't need to continue."

Clovis stares at Lindsey.

Lindsey stares back.

Several seconds pass.

Then Clovis gives Lindsey a single nod.

Nothing more.

He turns away.

Mark Bravo: "That's about as close to a handshake as you're ever getting from Clovis Black."

John Phillips: "Perhaps an acknowledgment that Lindsey was the better competitor tonight."

Mark Bravo: "Don't put words in his mouth. I like living."

Clovis steps through the ropes.

He drops to the floor.

Then begins the walk toward the back alone.

John Phillips: "That also means The Empire is now zero-for-two in qualifying matches tonight."

Mark Bravo: "Trey Mack eliminated by Bianca Page. Clovis Black eliminated by Lindsey Lothario."

John Phillips: "And later tonight, Valkyrie Knox will have perhaps the toughest assignment of them all when she faces Mike Best."

The camera briefly follows Clovis up the aisle.

He never looks back.

We return to Lindsey and Eli inside the ring.

John Phillips: "Meanwhile, The Creed Method has put its first representative into Ring King."

Mark Bravo: "And they've got another opportunity later tonight."

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey faces former UTA Champion Maxwell Jett in our main event."

Eli raises Lindsey's arm.

Lindsey looks toward their name on the screen again.

John Phillips: "Think about what Ring King represents for Lindsey Lothario. At One Last Stop, they challenged Bobby Dean for the International Championship and won the match, but not the title, because of the disqualification."

Mark Bravo: "Now they have another road."

John Phillips: "Win the Ring King tournament on September twenty-sixth and Lindsey earns a guaranteed UTA Championship opportunity."

Lindsey turns toward the hard camera.

They bring their fists up.

Then slowly lower them.

The smirk returns.

Mark Bravo: "And after what we just watched, I wouldn't dismiss their chances."

John Phillips: "Neither would I."

Lindsey steps through the ropes.

Eli follows.

They begin walking up the aisle together.

John Phillips: "Kirsty McKinney."

The screen briefly flashes Kirsty's qualifying graphic.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page."

Bianca's graphic replaces it.

John Phillips: "And now Lindsey Lothario."

Lindsey's name fills the screen once more.

John Phillips: "Three qualifiers tonight. Three more names added to the field."

Mark Bravo: "And we're not finished."

Lindsey and Eli reach the top of the entranceway.

Lindsey stops.

Turns back toward the arena.

Then points toward the massive Ring King logo hanging above the ring.

They draw a thumb across their own chest.

One message.

Me.

John Phillips: "Lindsey Lothario believes this tournament belongs to them."

Mark Bravo: "Sixteen people are going to believe that."

John Phillips: "Only one gets to be right."

Eli places a hand on Lindsey's shoulder.

The two disappear through the curtain as we cut away.

It's Not Personal

Segment

We cut backstage where Melissa Cartwright stands in the interview area, microphone in hand.

Melissa Cartwright: "Ladies and gentlemen, joining me now is a man who will compete later tonight in a Ring King qualifying match against Valkyrie Knoxx..."

Mike Best steps into frame before Melissa can finish.

No smile.

No playful acknowledgment of the camera.

He simply walks into position and looks at Melissa.

Mike Best: "A man?"

Melissa pauses.

Mike Best: "That's how we're introducing me now?"

Melissa Cartwright: "Mike—"

Mike Best: "UTA Hall of Famer."

He raises the hand bearing his Hall of Fame ring.

Mike Best: "World Champion more times than anybody watching this could count without taking their shoes off."

Mike Best: "Son of GOD."

Mike gestures toward himself.

Mike Best: "Mike."

A beat.

Mike Best: "Fucking."

Another.

Mike Best: "Best."

Melissa lets him finish.

Melissa Cartwright: "Are you finished?"

Mike looks mildly surprised.

Mike Best: "Probably not."

Melissa Cartwright: "At One Last Stop, you had an opportunity to become UTA Champion in the Triple Threat Match against Maxwell Jett and Chris Ross."

Mike's expression immediately changes.

Not anger exactly.

Something colder.

Melissa Cartwright: "Chris Ross left Toronto with the championship."

Mike Best: "Yeah."

Mike nods slowly.

Mike Best: "Funny how everybody keeps saying that."

Melissa Cartwright: "Because that's what happened."

Mike Best: "Chris Ross pinned Maxwell Jett."

Mike points toward himself.

Mike Best: "Not me."

Melissa Cartwright: "But you were in the match."

Mike Best: "Congratulations, Melissa. You understand triple threats."

Melissa's eyes narrow.

Mike Best: "Here's the part everybody apparently needs help with."

Mike steps slightly closer to the microphone.

Mike Best: "Nobody beat Mike Best."

Mike Best: "Chris Ross didn't beat Mike Best."

Mike Best: "Maxwell Jett sure as fuck didn't beat Mike Best."

Mike Best: "Mike Best happened to be standing in the same match when Chris Ross found somebody else weak enough to pin."

Mike shrugs.

Mike Best: "That's not defeat."

Mike Best: "That's bad logistics."

Melissa Cartwright: "You seemed considerably more angry about it immediately after the match."

Mike smiles.

Mike Best: "I was."

The smile disappears.

Mike Best: "Because I came here trying something different."

Mike Best: "I showed up smiling."

Mike Best: "I shook hands."

Mike Best: "I played nice."

Mike Best: "I let everybody have their cute little moment where they got to say, 'Wow, Mike Best is here! Isn't this fun?'"

Mike slowly shakes his head.

Mike Best: "And look where being nice got me."

He points downward.

Mike Best: "Standing backstage having to qualify for a tournament."

A disgusted laugh.

Mike Best: "Me."

Melissa Cartwright: "You don't believe you should have to qualify?"

Mike Best: "Melissa, I don't believe ninety percent of these people should be allowed to qualify."

Mike turns toward the camera.

Mike Best: "That's not arrogance."

He raises his Hall of Fame ring again.

Mike Best: "That's documented history."

Melissa Cartwright: "Regardless, your opponent tonight is Valkyrie Knoxx."

Mike nods.

Mike Best: "Yep."

Melissa Cartwright: "Former strongwoman competitor. An accomplished Muay Thai fighter. One of the most physically powerful women on the UTA roster."

Mike Best: "You know what's interesting about that question?"

Melissa Cartwright: "I didn't ask one yet."

Mike points at her.

Mike Best: "See? You're learning."

Melissa sighs.

Mike Best: "Everybody's gonna make this about the same thing."

Mike pitches his voice upward mockingly.

Mike Best: "'Oh my God, Mike Best is wrestling a woman! What's he gonna do? Is he gonna hold back? Is he gonna feel bad?'"

Mike stares directly into the camera.

Mike Best: "No."

Pause.

Mike Best: "I don't give a shit that Valkyrie Knoxx is a woman."

Melissa Cartwright: "I wasn't suggesting—"

Mike Best: "I know."

Mike Best: "I'm saving everybody else the trouble."

He taps himself on the chest.

Mike Best: "Former DREAM Women's Champion."

Melissa looks at him.

Mike Best: "Look it up."

Mike smiles smugly.

Mike Best: "Been there."

Mike Best: "Won that."

Mike Best: "Valkyrie Knoxx isn't a woman I'm wrestling tonight."

His tone sharpens.

Mike Best: "She's an opponent."

Mike Best: "She's standing between me and Ring King."

Mike Best: "Which means she's standing between me and the UTA Championship."

Mike leans toward Melissa's microphone.

Mike Best: "That makes her a problem."

Pause.

Mike Best: "And I solve problems."

Melissa Cartwright: "The Empire has already had two opportunities to qualify tonight. Trey Mack lost to Bianca Page, and Clovis Black lost to Lindsey Lothario. Does that place additional pressure on Valkyrie?"

Mike laughs.

Mike Best: "That's an Empire problem."

Melissa Cartwright: "You don't think that makes Valkyrie more dangerous?"

Mike Best: "Oh, she's dangerous."

For perhaps the first time, Mike's answer is completely sincere.

Mike Best: "Don't misunderstand me."

Mike Best: "She's strong."

Mike Best: "She's mean."

Mike Best: "She knows how to hurt people."

Mike Best: "And she's probably gonna hit me really fucking hard."

Mike shrugs.

Mike Best: "So what?"

He points toward himself again.

Mike Best: "I'm Mike Best."

Mike Best: "I've been hit hard."

Mike Best: "I've been dropped on my head."

Mike Best: "I've been cut open."

Mike Best: "I've fought monsters."

Mike Best: "I've fought legends."

Mike Best: "I've fought people who legitimately wanted to kill me."

Mike tilts his head.

Mike Best: "Some of them were family."

He lets that sit for a moment.

Mike Best: "Valkyrie doesn't need me to pretend she isn't dangerous."

Mike Best: "She needs to understand that dangerous isn't the same thing as better."

Melissa Cartwright: "And you believe you're better."

Mike looks genuinely offended by the phrasing.

Mike Best: "Believe?"

He laughs.

Mike Best: "Melissa, people believe in Bigfoot."

Mike Best: "People believe Philadelphia has a good football team."

The crowd can be heard booing from inside the arena.

Mike hears it.

His grin widens.

Mike Best: "There they are."

Melissa Cartwright: "You realize we're in Philadelphia."

Mike Best: "That's why I said it."

He turns toward the camera again.

Mike Best: "I don't believe I'm better."

Mike slowly raises his Hall of Fame hand.

Mike Best: "I have receipts."

Melissa Cartwright: "Let's say you defeat Valkyrie tonight."

Mike Best: "When."

Melissa Cartwright: "Mike—"

Mike Best: "When."

Melissa pauses.

Melissa Cartwright: "When you defeat Valkyrie tonight, you enter a sixteen-person tournament that already includes all six current singles champions."

Mike Best: "Including Chris Ross."

Melissa Cartwright: "Yes."

Mike's smile disappears again.

Mike Best: "Good."

A quiet beat.

Melissa Cartwright: "You want Ross in the tournament?"

Mike Best: "Melissa..."

Mike looks directly into the lens.

Mike Best: "I want Chris Ross everywhere."

Mike Best: "I want him backstage."

Mike Best: "I want him at ringside."

Mike Best: "I want him in the bracket."

Mike Best: "I want him holding that championship every single week."

Mike's voice becomes quieter.

Mike Best: "Because I don't want him disappearing before I get what I came here for."

Melissa watches him carefully.

Mike Best: "Chris can call himself the Reaper."

Mike Best: "He can drag chairs around."

Mike Best: "He can turn the lights off."

Mike Best: "He can ring bells."

Mike smiles dismissively.

Mike Best: "It's very spooky."

His expression hardens.

Mike Best: "But eventually the lights come back on."

Pause.

Mike Best: "And when they do..."

Mike raises his Hall of Fame ring toward the camera.

Mike Best: "...he's still standing across from Mike fucking Best."

Melissa Cartwright: "You're looking several rounds ahead."

Mike Best: "No."

Mike shakes his head.

Mike Best: "I'm looking exactly where I'm supposed to."

Mike Best: "Valkyrie first."

Mike Best: "Then whoever they put in front of me."

Mike Best: "Then whoever comes after that."

He leans toward Melissa.

Mike Best: "And eventually..."

Mike motions around his waist.

Mike Best: "...my championship."

Melissa Cartwright: "Chris Ross's championship."

Silence.

Mike slowly turns his head toward Melissa.

She doesn't back down.

Mike stares for several seconds.

Then smiles.

Mike Best: "You're getting brave."

Melissa Cartwright: "It's my job."

Mike Best: "Keep telling yourself that."

Mike steps out of frame.

Then suddenly steps back in.

Mike Best: "Oh."

Melissa raises the microphone again.

Mike Best: "One more thing."

Mike looks straight into the camera.

Mike Best: "Valkyrie..."

Pause.

Mike Best: "Don't take tonight personally."

A nasty little smile.

Mike Best: "You're just the first person they made me go through."

Mike turns and walks away.

Melissa watches him disappear down the hallway.

She slowly brings the microphone back toward herself.

Melissa Cartwright: "Mike Best faces Valkyrie Knoxx later tonight with a place in the 2026 Ring King tournament on the line."

She pauses.

Melissa Cartwright: "And apparently, humility will not be accompanying him to the ring."

Cut.

Evidence

Segment

The broadcast returns to a sweeping shot of the Xfinity Mobile Arena.

Philadelphia is still buzzing from the action tonight when—

Everything goes black.

John Phillips: "Wait a minute..."

Darkness.

Then...

DOOOOOONG.

A bell tolls through the arena.

Once.

Deep.

Heavy.

Familiar.

Mark Bravo: "Oh, you know what that is."

Another toll.

DOOOOOONG.

Not just any bell.

The Liberty Bell.

Philadelphia realizes it at almost the exact same moment.

The roar begins to build.

Voice: "Ladies and gentlemen..."

A pause.

Voice: "He is YOUR UTA WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION!"

The reaction explodes.

Voice: "He is your fellow Keystone State resident!"

Another pause.

Voice: "THE REAPER..."

The screen flashes.

An alleyway in Harrisburg.

Wet pavement.

Flickering streetlights.

Voice: "...OF HARRISBURG..."

A cemetery.

A dark figure walking between the stones.

Voice: "...IS HERE!"

The opening of "Black Flame" by Bury Tomorrow tears through the arena.

Red.

Blue.

White.

Police lights begin flashing throughout the entranceway.

Then he emerges.

Chris Ross.

The UTA World Heavyweight Championship rests across his shoulder.

A long black jacket hangs from his frame.

His hair is messy.

His facial hair unkempt.

There is no attempt to make the champion look polished.

No tailored suit.

No corporate presentation.

Chris Ross looks like Chris Ross.

Only now...

He's carrying the most important championship in the company.

John Phillips: "There he is. The man who walked into Toronto and walked out UTA World Champion."

Mark Bravo: "And listen to Philadelphia!"

Ross stops at the top of the ramp.

He closes his eyes.

For several seconds, he simply listens.

"ROSS!"

"ROSS!"

"ROSS!"

His head slowly begins to nod.

A faint smile forms.

John Phillips: "We're in Pennsylvania tonight, and they know exactly who their champion is."

Ross begins walking.

In his right hand?

A steel chair.

He doesn't carry it.

He drags it.

SCRAAAAAAAAAAPE.

Steel against the entrance ramp.

Every few steps the sound cuts underneath the music.

SCRAAAAAAAAAAPE.

Mark Bravo: "There's something appropriate about Chris Ross bringing a chair to his own championship celebration."

John Phillips: "Celebration? I'm not sure Chris Ross celebrates anything normally."

Ross reaches ringside.

He throws the chair over the top rope.

CLANG!

Then slides underneath the bottom rope.

Ross retrieves the chair.

Sets it directly in the center of the ring.

He takes a microphone.

Then sits.

Backward.

Arms folded across the backrest.

The UTA Championship remains draped over his shoulder.

"Black Flame" fades.

Ross doesn't immediately speak.

He looks around.

Slowly.

Almost studying them.

Then he raises the microphone.

Chris Ross: "Philadelphia..."

That's all it takes.

The building erupts.

Ross lowers the microphone.

Lets them have it.

He smiles.

Not the wild grin of the Chris Ross of old.

Something quieter.

Something satisfied.

Eventually the microphone rises again.

Chris Ross: "Yeah."

Another small nod.

Chris Ross: "That's about the reaction I was expecting from my Keystone State brethren."

Cheers.

Chris Ross: "Because for the first time..."

Ross looks around the arena.

Chris Ross: "...in a very long time..."

Pause.

Chris Ross: "...I'm home."

Another enormous reaction.

"WELCOME HOME!"

"WELCOME HOME!"

"WELCOME HOME!"

Ross listens.

His fingers lightly tap the championship.

Chris Ross: "Now..."

He smiles.

Chris Ross: "I know."

Chris Ross: "Somebody's gonna tell me..."

He changes his voice slightly.

Chris Ross: "'Chris... Harrisburg's about a hundred miles that way.'"

Ross points west.

The crowd laughs.

Chris Ross: "I know where the fuck Harrisburg is."

Big pop.

Chris Ross: "But this?"

Ross points downward.

Chris Ross: "This is Pennsylvania."

He looks around again.

Chris Ross: "These are my people."

The cheers rise again.

Chris Ross: "Because I didn't learn how to survive in a boardroom."

Chris Ross: "I didn't learn it at some private club."

Chris Ross: "Nobody handed me a trust fund and told me the world was waiting."

The audience immediately catches the implication.

Chris Ross: "I learned survival on cracked sidewalks."

Chris Ross: "Parking lots."

Chris Ross: "Cell blocks."

Chris Ross: "Places where if you hit the ground..."

Ross leans slightly closer to the microphone.

Chris Ross: "...nobody was coming to save you."

A beat.

Chris Ross: "That's why they called me..."

Ross looks directly into the hard camera.

Chris Ross: "...The Keystone State Killa."

Philadelphia erupts.

"KEYSTONE STATE KILLA!"

"KEYSTONE STATE KILLA!"

Ross doesn't shout over them.

He waits.

When they finally settle, his expression changes.

The smile disappears.

Chris Ross: "But something changed."

Quiet.

Chris Ross: "I stopped fighting to survive."

Ross rubs his thumb across the faceplate of the UTA Championship.

Chris Ross: "And I started making other people understand..."

His eyes rise.

Chris Ross: "...what survival feels like."

The crowd murmurs.

Chris Ross: "Maxwell Jett understands."

Loud boos at the name.

Ross chuckles.

Chris Ross: "Maxwell spent months telling everybody I was stupid."

Chris Ross: "Brainless."

Chris Ross: "A barbarian."

Chris Ross: "A man with an anger problem."

Ross lowers his head.

A quiet laugh escapes him.

Chris Ross: "Hehehehehe..."

He slowly looks back up.

Chris Ross: "Funny thing is..."

Chris Ross: "...I took his advice."

Ross reaches down.

His fingers touch the steel chair beneath him.

Chris Ross: "See this?"

Tap.

Tap.

Tap.

Chris Ross: "Everybody thought this was my weapon."

Ross shakes his head.

Chris Ross: "No."

Pause.

Chris Ross: "That was the old Chris Ross."

Ross leans forward over the chair.

Chris Ross: "The Reaper of Harrisburg found something better."

Another pause.

Chris Ross: "Fear."

Ross smiles.

Chris Ross: "Fear is my weapon."

The reaction swells.

Chris Ross: "Because hitting Maxwell Jett with a chair?"

He shrugs.

Chris Ross: "That hurts for a little while."

Chris Ross: "But making Maxwell Jett wonder when that chair is coming?"

Ross taps his temple.

Chris Ross: "That stays."

Ross stands from the chair.

Slowly.

Chris Ross: "Hotel hallways."

He takes a step.

Chris Ross: "Parking garages."

Another.

Chris Ross: "Locker rooms."

Another.

Chris Ross: "Every time the lights went out..."

Ross snaps his fingers.

Chris Ross: "...he wondered."

Chris Ross: "Every time he heard steel hit concrete..."

Ross kicks the chair.

CLANG!

The sudden noise echoes through the arena.

Chris Ross: "...he wondered."

Ross slowly walks toward the camera side of the ring.

Chris Ross: "Is he here?"

Pause.

Chris Ross: "Is tonight the night?"

Ross's smile returns.

Chris Ross: "Is this when the Reaper comes?"

The crowd begins chanting.

"ROSS!"

"ROSS!"

"ROSS!"

Ross chuckles beneath it.

Chris Ross: "That's the beautiful thing about fear."

He waits.

Chris Ross: "Maxwell thought he could get an advantage on me."

Chris Ross: "Outthink me."

Chris Ross: "Outwait me."

Ross shakes his head.

Chris Ross: "Problem is..."

He looks directly into the camera.

Chris Ross: "...fear doesn't sleep."

Pause.

Chris Ross: "And neither do I."

Ross pats the UTA Championship.

The crowd roars.

Chris Ross: "Which brings us to this."

Ross slowly removes the championship from his shoulder.

He holds it in front of himself.

Studies it.

Chris Ross: "Take a good look."

He turns it toward the hard camera.

Chris Ross: "This isn't a prize anymore."

Ross pauses.

His eyes rise above the championship.

Chris Ross: "It's evidence."

The building erupts.

Chris Ross: "Evidence that Maxwell Jett was wrong."

Chris Ross: "Evidence that Mike Best was wrong."

Chris Ross: "Evidence that every promoter who blacklisted me..."

Chris Ross: "...every executive who decided Chris Ross was too dangerous..."

Chris Ross: "...every person who decided I was something wrestling would be better off without..."

Ross raises the championship.

Chris Ross: "...was wrong."

Ross lifts the UTA World Championship over his head.

Philadelphia explodes.

John Phillips: "That championship means something very different to Chris Ross."

Mark Bravo: "He's not wearing it like an accomplishment. He's wearing it like an indictment."

Ross lowers the championship back onto his shoulder.

Then looks down at the overturned chair.

Chris Ross: "Maxwell Jett..."

A slight grin.

Chris Ross: "You really should've been more careful about the company you kept."

The audience reacts.

Chris Ross: "Because Mike Best..."

Ross stops.

He chuckles again.

Chris Ross: "Mike..."

His tone becomes almost conversational.

Chris Ross: "You and I understand each other better than most."

Chris Ross: "You don't scare easy."

Chris Ross: "You don't intimidate easy."

Chris Ross: "And I know damn well you're not going anywhere."

Ross nods.

Chris Ross: "Good."

Long pause.

Chris Ross: "Because if you want to step into my cemetery..."

Ross's voice drops quieter.

Chris Ross: "...I'm not gonna bury you."

He smiles.

Chris Ross: "I'm gonna hand you the shovel."

Philadelphia reacts.

Chris Ross: "And I'm gonna make you dig the grave yourself."

Ross lets the words hang.

John Phillips: "That's a message Mike Best is going to hear loud and clear."

Ross slowly turns toward the massive Ring King graphic displayed above the entranceway.

Chris Ross: "But tonight isn't about the past."

He studies the graphic.

Chris Ross: "Tonight..."

Pause.

Chris Ross: "...everybody wants to talk about Ring King."

The crowd cheers.

Chris Ross: "Sixteen people."

Chris Ross: "One tournament."

Chris Ross: "Everybody dreaming about September twenty-sixth."

Ross turns back toward the camera.

Chris Ross: "Everybody wants the throne."

Ross looks at the championship.

Chris Ross: "Here's the problem."

He smiles.

Chris Ross: "The Reaper doesn't need a throne."

Big reaction.

Chris Ross: "And because I'm standing here with this..."

He pats the championship.

Chris Ross: "...I don't need to qualify."

Chris Ross: "My name is already in that tournament."

Ross begins slowly pacing again.

Chris Ross: "So I'm watching tonight."

Chris Ross: "I'm watching people fight for their opportunity."

Chris Ross: "I'm watching people punch their ticket."

Chris Ross: "And I look at every name going into Ring King."

Ross stops.

Chris Ross: "You know what I see?"

Quiet.

Chris Ross: "A list."

Ross grins.

Chris Ross: "That's all."

Chris Ross: "Just..."

He gestures toward the Ring King graphic.

Chris Ross: "...a list."

Ross's eyes narrow.

Chris Ross: "And the Reaper's list..."

Pause.

Chris Ross: "...is far from finished."

The crowd roars.

Chris Ross: "You can be talented."

Chris Ross: "You can be rich."

Chris Ross: "You can be famous."

Chris Ross: "You can bring a manager."

Chris Ross: "Bring a faction."

Chris Ross: "Bring your friends."

Chris Ross: "Bring your family."

Ross slowly shakes his head.

Chris Ross: "It doesn't matter."

He walks toward the hard camera.

Chris Ross: "Because once your name ends up on my list..."

Ross lowers his voice until the audience has to listen.

Chris Ross: "...you don't get to decide when it happens."

Pause.

Chris Ross: "You don't get to decide where."

Another pause.

Chris Ross: "You don't get to decide how."

Ross's eyes remain locked on the camera.

Chris Ross: "Anytime."

The crowd begins joining him.

Chris Ross: "Any place."

Louder.

Chris Ross: "Anywhere."

Ross smiles.

Chris Ross: "The Reaper can strike."

The arena erupts into another chant.

"ROSS!"

"ROSS!"

"ROSS!"

Ross looks around his home state crowd.

He slowly lifts the UTA World Heavyweight Championship.

Higher.

Higher.

Until it is above his head.

The chant continues.

Chris Ross: "Seven..."

The crowd gets louder.

Chris Ross: "One..."

Ross's twisted grin spreads across his face.

Chris Ross: "SEVEN!"

He thrusts the championship higher.

Chris Ross: "H! B! G!"

Ross lowers the microphone for just a moment.

Then roars the final word alongside the Pennsylvania crowd.

Chris Ross: "REPRESENT!"

"Black Flame" by Bury Tomorrow immediately blasts through the arena again.

Red, white and blue police lights begin flashing.

Ross drops the microphone.

He doesn't celebrate traditionally.

He simply stands in the center of the ring.

World Championship raised.

Steel chair overturned at his feet.

That same unsettling grin across his face.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross is going to Ring King."

Mark Bravo: "And I think everybody else entering that tournament just got told exactly what the World Champion thinks they're signing up for."

John Phillips: "The old Chris Ross wanted to hurt you."

The camera moves tighter on Ross.

His eyes stare directly into the lens.

John Phillips: "This Chris Ross wants you afraid of him long before he ever gets the chance."

Ross mouths two words toward the camera.

Chris Ross: "Who's next?"

The camera holds on the UTA World Heavyweight Championship.

Then slowly fades.

Pin Me for the Three

Segment

We cut backstage.

The camera finds the door to The Empire locker room.

Inside, the atmosphere is considerably less celebratory than usual.

Trey Mack sits on a bench, elbows resting on his knees.

Clovis Black stands near the lockers.

Silent.

Expression unreadable.

Amy Harrison leans against the far wall with her arms folded.

And pacing directly in front of all of them...

Marie Van Claudio.

The First Lady of The Empire does not look happy.

Marie Van Claudio: "Two."

She stops pacing.

Marie Van Claudio: "Two opportunities."

Marie looks directly at Trey.

Marie Van Claudio: "Gone."

Then toward Clovis.

Marie Van Claudio: "Two chances to put The Empire into Ring King tonight..."

Her eyes narrow.

Marie Van Claudio: "...and both of you failed."

Trey exhales through his nose.

Clovis gives nothing.

Marie Van Claudio: "Bianca Page."

Marie looks toward Trey.

Marie Van Claudio: "Bianca."

Trey raises his head.

Trey Mack: "Yeah, I know who beat me."

Marie Van Claudio: "Good."

She turns toward Clovis.

Marie Van Claudio: "And Lindsey Lothario."

Clovis slowly turns his eyes toward her.

Marie Van Claudio: "You had every physical advantage in the world."

Clovis' jaw tightens slightly.

Marie Van Claudio: "And now they're going to Ring King."

Pause.

Marie Van Claudio: "You're not."

Trey sits upright.

Trey Mack: "Look, nobody's happy about it."

Marie Van Claudio: "I'm not interested in whether anyone is happy."

Marie turns toward him.

Marie Van Claudio: "I'm interested in results."

Trey Mack: "And we still got Valkyrie."

Marie stops.

That lands.

Marie Van Claudio: "Yes."

A thin smile.

Marie Van Claudio: "We still have Valkyrie."

Marie looks toward the door.

Marie Van Claudio: "And she better win."

Trey raises an eyebrow.

Trey Mack: "She's wrestling Mike Best."

Marie Van Claudio: "I know exactly who she's wrestling."

Trey Mack: "Just saying."

Marie Van Claudio: "Then don't."

Trey leans back slightly.

Amy watches all of this from the wall.

Quiet.

So far.

Marie Van Claudio: "Fortunately..."

Marie turns back toward the room.

Marie Van Claudio: "...even if Valkyrie somehow disappoints me too, tonight isn't a complete disaster."

Amy's eyes lift.

Marie Van Claudio: "Because The Empire is guaranteed a place in Ring King next week."

Marie looks toward Amy.

Marie Van Claudio: "When Amy lays down for me."

Silence.

Trey slowly turns his head toward Amy.

Clovis does the same.

Amy remains against the wall.

Then...

She laughs.

Once.

Short.

Disbelieving.

Amy Harrison: "I'm sorry."

Amy pushes herself away from the wall.

Amy Harrison: "I think I heard you wrong."

She walks several steps toward Marie.

Amy Harrison: "Lay down?"

Marie doesn't move.

Amy Harrison: "You going over?"

Marie Van Claudio: "Yes."

Immediate.

No hesitation.

Marie Van Claudio: "Obviously."

Amy's eyebrows rise.

Marie Van Claudio: "I'm the leader here."

Pause.

Marie Van Claudio: "Why on earth would I not be the one taking the spot?"

Amy stares at her.

Then scoffs.

Amy Harrison: "Leader."

Marie tilts her head.

Amy Harrison: "That's cute."

Trey looks between them.

Clovis remains motionless.

Amy Harrison: "Let me ask you something, Marie."

Amy takes another step forward.

Amy Harrison: "Who held The Empire together through one of the greatest runs any faction in UTA history has ever had?"

Marie says nothing.

Amy Harrison: "Who stood at the front?"

Amy Harrison: "Who took the hits?"

Amy Harrison: "Who made sure everybody knew exactly what The Empire was?"

Amy gestures toward herself.

Amy Harrison: "Because it sure as hell wasn't you."

The room changes.

Immediately.

Marie's expression hardens.

Trey sits forward.

Even Clovis seems more attentive now.

Marie Van Claudio: "Be very careful."

Amy smiles.

Amy Harrison: "Why?"

Marie Van Claudio: "Because while you may have been the face everyone saw..."

Marie steps toward her.

Marie Van Claudio: "...don't ever confuse being the face with being the mind."

Amy's smile starts fading.

Marie Van Claudio: "You stood in front of the cameras."

Marie Van Claudio: "You made speeches."

Marie Van Claudio: "You wore the colors."

Marie Van Claudio: "But remember who was pulling the strings."

Amy looks at Marie for several long seconds.

Then a grin slowly returns.

Amy Harrison: "Strings."

Amy nods.

Amy Harrison: "Funny."

She steps even closer.

Amy Harrison: "Only strings I've seen you pulling lately are heartstrings."

Marie's eyes narrow.

Amy Harrison: "What happened?"

Amy tilts her head mockingly.

Amy Harrison: "Did little ol' Marie shed a tear when she retired Hardcore Sandy?"

Marie's fist balls at her side.

Amy sees it.

And smiles wider.

Amy Harrison: "Aww."

Marie Van Claudio: "You don't know what you're talking about."

Amy Harrison: "I know exactly what I'm talking about."

Marie takes another step.

Amy doesn't move.

They are nearly nose-to-nose now.

Marie Van Claudio: "Say it again."

Amy's smile disappears.

Amy Harrison: "You heard me."

Marie's other fist closes.

Trey suddenly shoots to his feet.

Trey Mack: "ENOUGH!"

The volume cuts through the room.

Marie and Amy both turn toward him.

Trey steps between them.

One hand toward Marie.

The other toward Amy.

Trey Mack: "Nah."

Trey shakes his head.

Trey Mack: "We ain't doing this."

Marie Van Claudio: "Move."

Trey Mack: "No."

Marie glares at him.

Trey Mack: "You can be pissed at me later."

He turns toward Amy.

Trey Mack: "You too."

Amy Harrison: "Trey—"

Trey Mack: "No."

He points between them.

Trey Mack: "Look at what y'all are doing."

Neither woman responds.

Trey Mack: "We got Valkyrie about to walk out there against Mike Best."

Trey Mack: "We got another qualifier next week."

Trey Mack: "We got Ring King coming."

Trey Mack: "And instead of figuring out how The Empire takes over that damn tournament..."

He gestures between them.

Trey Mack: "...y'all wanna fight each other over who gets to call themselves boss?"

Marie folds her arms.

Amy does the same.

Trey Mack: "Come on."

Trey shakes his head.

Trey Mack: "Now ain't the time."

He looks toward Clovis.

Clovis gives a single nod.

Trey Mack: "See? Big man agrees."

No one laughs.

Trey notices.

Trey Mack: "Damn. Tough room."

He becomes serious again.

Trey Mack: "The Empire doesn't get pulled apart over one bad night."

Trey Mack: "We don't start tearing each other down because Bianca got one over on me."

Trey Mack: "Or Lindsey got Clovis."

Trey Mack: "We sure as hell don't do it when Valkyrie is about to go out there representing all of us."

Trey looks toward Marie.

Trey Mack: "You said it earlier."

Pause.

Trey Mack: "All the way Empire."

Then toward Amy.

Trey Mack: "That means all of us."

Amy looks away for a moment.

Trey Mack: "The Empire is as strong as ever."

Silence.

Marie looks past Trey toward Amy.

Her jaw unclenches.

Slowly.

Marie Van Claudio: "Stronger."

Trey turns toward her.

Marie Van Claudio: "We're stronger."

Amy looks back at Marie.

Another long pause.

Amy Harrison: "Fine."

Marie raises an eyebrow.

Amy Harrison: "You want the Ring King spot?"

Amy shrugs.

Amy Harrison: "You can have it."

Trey exhales.

Relieved.

Marie gives a satisfied little smile.

Marie Van Claudio: "Good."

Amy starts to turn away.

Then stops.

Amy Harrison: "When you pin me for the three."

The smile immediately disappears from Marie's face.

Trey closes his eyes.

Clovis slowly looks toward Amy.

Amy turns back around.

Amy Harrison: "You said you're the leader."

Amy takes one slow step toward Marie.

Amy Harrison: "You said you're the one who should represent The Empire."

Another.

Amy Harrison: "So represent it."

Marie stares at her.

Amy Harrison: "I'm not laying down."

Silence.

Amy Harrison: "You want that spot?"

Amy's eyes narrow.

Amy Harrison: "Beat me."

Marie and Amy stare at one another across the locker room.

Trey remains between them.

But this time...

He doesn't say anything.

There's nothing to say.

Marie slowly nods.

Once.

Her expression unreadable.

Marie Van Claudio: "Fine."

Amy gives the faintest smile.

Amy Harrison: "Good."

The camera holds on the two women.

Neither looking away.

Neither backing down.

Trey glances from one to the other.

Clovis remains silent in the background.

And somewhere beyond the locker room walls, Valkyrie Knoxx's match with Mike Best is drawing closer.

Fade out.

The Sun Still Rises

Segment

THE SUN STILL RISES

The broadcast returns backstage inside the Xfinity Mobile Arena.

A black road case sits against the concrete wall beneath a monitor displaying the newly revealed Ring King 2026 bracket.

Several names have already been highlighted.

Empty spaces remain for the competitors still fighting their way into the tournament.

Standing in front of the monitor is Sol Azteca.

Her white-and-gold mask catches the cold overhead lighting.

A UTA hooded sweatshirt hangs open over her ring gear.

Fresh athletic tape circles both wrists.

Her arms are folded.

Her attention remains fixed upon the bracket.

Katy Winters approaches from the side with a microphone in hand.

Katy Winters: "Sol, we've learned that you'll return to action at the next UTA event. After everything that's happened between you and Emily Hightower, what does it mean to finally have another match scheduled?"

Sol continues looking at the bracket for another moment.

Then she turns.

Sol Azteca: "It means I finally get to wrestle."

Katy hesitates slightly.

Katy Winters: "You've competed several times since arriving in UTA."

Sol gives a quiet laugh.

There is little amusement in it.

Sol Azteca: "I have entered the ring several times."

She raises one taped finger.

Sol Azteca: "There is a difference."

Sol steps away from the monitor.

She faces the camera directly.

Sol Azteca: "Since I came here, every match has carried the same question."

Sol Azteca: "Where is David?"

Sol Azteca: "Where is Buck?"

Sol Azteca: "Where is Dakota?"

Sol Azteca: "What has Emily planned?"

Sol Azteca: "Who is standing near the timekeeper?"

Sol Azteca: "Who is underneath the ring?"

Sol Azteca: "Who has a chain?"

Sol Azteca: "Who is waiting for the referee to turn around?"

Her hand lowers.

Sol Azteca: "I came to the United Toughness Alliance because I wanted to test myself against the best wrestlers in the world."

A beat.

Sol Azteca: "Instead, I learned to count Hightowers."

She begins tapping the fingers of one hand.

Sol Azteca: "One at ringside."

Sol Azteca: "One in the aisle."

Sol Azteca: "One shouting instructions."

Sol Azteca: "One waiting to interfere."

Sol looks down at her hand.

Sol Azteca: "Sometimes I ran out of fingers."

The edge in her voice softens just enough for the humor to register.

Her eyes remain fixed upon the camera.

Sol Azteca: "At the next show, that changes."

She steps closer.

Sol Azteca: "No family gathering around the ring."

Sol Azteca: "No father deciding when his daughter needs to be rescued."

Sol Azteca: "No brother creating a distraction."

Sol Azteca: "No sister appearing from behind me."

Sol Azteca: "No tow chain sliding across the canvas like an invitation."

Her fingers briefly touch the lower edge of her mask.

Instinctive.

Protective.

Sol Azteca: "Just Sol Azteca and the person standing across from her."

Katy raises the microphone again.

Katy Winters: "Do you feel the situation with Emily prevented the UTA audience from seeing what you're truly capable of?"

Sol considers the question.

Sol Azteca: "They have seen pieces."

She points toward the monitor behind her.

Sol Azteca: "They have seen that I can survive."

Sol Azteca: "They have seen that I can bleed."

Sol Azteca: "They have seen that I will keep fighting when someone tears my mask, wraps steel around my throat and tries to make me surrender."

Her eyes sharpen.

Sol Azteca: "Emily learned that Sol Azteca does not surrender."

A beat passes.

Sol Azteca: "But survival is only one part of me."

She moves into the open space beside the road cases.

Her hands begin to move as she speaks.

Sol Azteca: "They have not seen what happens when I can build a match instead of surviving an ambush."

Sol Azteca: "They have not seen me change rhythm because my opponent begins anticipating the first one."

Sol Azteca: "They have not seen me take away a leg, control the shoulders, create distance and then remove it before the other person understands what changed."

Sol snaps her fingers.

Sol Azteca: "They have seen me fight through chaos."

She gestures toward the arena.

Sol Azteca: "Now they get to see me control it."

The confidence in her voice rises with each sentence.

Not arrogance.

Anticipation.

Sol Azteca: "I have wrestled since I was eight years old."

Sol Azteca: "I learned lucha libre in Mexico."

Sol Azteca: "I learned discipline in Sendai."

Sol Azteca: "I learned that speed means nothing without timing..."

She pauses.

Sol Azteca: "...and flying means nothing if you do not understand where you are going to land."

She taps two fingers against her temple.

Sol Azteca: "People look at the mask."

Sol Azteca: "They see the colors."

Sol Azteca: "And they think they understand me."

Sol spreads her arms slightly.

Sol Azteca: "They see the sun."

Her hands close into fists.

Sol Azteca: "They forget what it burns."

Katy glances toward the Ring King graphic.

Katy Winters: "With Ring King beginning tonight, and every singles champion guaranteed entry into the tournament, is that championship opportunity now your focus?"

Sol turns her head toward the bracket.

Sol Azteca: "Every wrestler in this building should be looking at that throne."

She walks back toward the monitor.

Sol places one finger against an unfilled position in the bracket.

Sol Azteca: "But I am done asking people to imagine what I could do if Emily Hightower and her family were not surrounding the ring."

Sol faces the camera one final time.

Sol Azteca: "At the next show, I prove it."

She removes her hooded sweatshirt.

Sol folds it neatly over the road case.

The full white-and-gold gear beneath it is revealed.

Prepared.

Ready.

Sol Azteca: "My opponent will receive every advantage Emily refused to give me."

She begins counting deliberately.

Sol Azteca: "A clear ring."

Another finger.

Sol Azteca: "A fair beginning."

A third.

Sol Azteca: "My complete attention."

Sol tilts her head.

Sol Azteca: "They may discover the Hightower family was protecting more than Emily."

She looks once more toward the bracket.

Sol Azteca: "Next show, the excuses leave the ring."

Sol steps past Katy and begins walking toward the training area.

After several steps, she stops.

She glances back over her shoulder.

Sol Azteca: "Then the world finally meets Sol Azteca."

Sol disappears around the corner.

Katy watches her leave.

The camera slowly shifts back toward the monitor.

One of the open positions in the Ring King bracket fills the screen.

We linger there for several seconds before fading out.

Valkyrie Knox vs. Mike Best

Match

The Ring King logo remains stretched across the massive video wall.

The Philadelphia crowd buzzes in anticipation as John Phillips and Mark Bravo remain at ringside.

John Phillips: "Three qualifying matches are in the books. Kirsty McKinney, Bianca Page and Lindsey Lothario are all headed to Ring King."

Mark Bravo: "And The Empire is zero-for-two."

John Phillips: "Trey Mack fell to Bianca Page. Clovis Black was just defeated by Lindsey Lothario. Which means Valkyrie Knox now represents The Empire's third opportunity tonight."

Mark Bravo: "Except somebody apparently looked at her and said, 'You know what would make this difficult? Mike Best.'"

John Phillips: "The UTA Hall of Famer. The Son of GOD. And after what happened at One Last Stop, I'm not entirely sure what version of Mike Best we're about to see."

Mark Bravo: "Oh, I think we know exactly what version we're getting."

The lights suddenly drop.

Blackness swallows the entranceway.

Then a voice cuts through the arena.

"Something special 'bout me, you can already tell the energy is different."

The reaction hits immediately.

Loud.

Mixed.

But rapidly turning hostile.

"Confidence is at the highest level, I don't ever see it dippin'."

John Phillips: "Here we go."

The opening of "Pandemonium" by NF pounds through the Xfinity Mobile Arena.

And Mike Best steps through the curtain.

He stops at the top of the entranceway.

No smile.

No wave.

No moment of gratitude for the reaction.

He simply looks around Philadelphia with an expression that suggests the entire building should be grateful he bothered showing up.

Mark Bravo: "Yep."

John Phillips: "Yep?"

Mark Bravo: "Asshole Mike."

John Phillips: "Mark."

Mark Bravo: "You have another description?"

Mike slowly looks toward the camera.

His eyes narrow.

Then he raises his right hand.

The middle finger goes up.

Prominently displayed on that same hand...

The UTA Hall of Fame ring.

Philadelphia erupts in boos.

John Phillips: "Classy."

Mark Bravo: "That's a Hall of Fame middle finger."

John Phillips: "That does not improve it."

Mike looks at the ring on his finger.

Then directly into the lens.

He mouths two words.

Mike Best: "You're welcome."

The boos get louder.

John Phillips: "At One Last Stop, Mike Best had his opportunity at the UTA Championship."

Mark Bravo: "And according to Mike Best, everybody in this company conspired to take it away from him."

John Phillips: "Mike wasn't pinned. Chris Ross pinned Maxwell Jett to win the championship."

Mark Bravo: "Good luck explaining that distinction to Mike."

Mike starts down the aisle.

Slowly.

Not the easygoing saunter we saw when he first arrived in UTA.

This walk is different.

More deliberate.

More contemptuous.

Like a man reporting to a job he believes he's overqualified to perform.

John Phillips: "After that match, Mike Best told Melissa Cartwright that the version of him who came into UTA smiling, shaking hands and playing the returning legend was dead."

Mark Bravo: "Looks pretty dead to me."

John Phillips: "He said he was done being nice."

Mark Bravo: "And apparently he intends to make that everybody else's problem."

A fan along the barricade extends a hand toward Mike.

Mike looks at it.

Looks at the fan.

Then deliberately walks around the hand.

Several steps later, another fan shouts something at him.

Mike stops.

Turns around.

Points to his Hall of Fame ring.

Mike Best: "Google me."

He turns back toward the ring.

John Phillips: "Oh, he's going to be unbearable."

Mark Bravo: "Going to be?"

Mike continues toward ringside.

John Phillips: "There is another element to this match that bears mentioning. Mike Best didn't come to UTA merely looking for another run."

Mark Bravo: "No. He came here for the UTA Championship."

John Phillips: "And after failing to leave Toronto with it, Ring King gives him perhaps the clearest path right back to Chris Ross."

Mark Bravo: "Win this qualifier. Win the tournament. Get the guaranteed title shot."

John Phillips: "It's that simple."

Mark Bravo: "Nothing involving Mike Best is ever that simple."

Mike reaches the ringside area.

He stops at the bottom of the steel steps.

Looks toward the ring.

Then looks up at the giant Ring King logo.

A dismissive smirk appears.

John Phillips: "You can almost see what he's thinking."

Mark Bravo: "Probably something modest."

Mike looks toward the nearest camera.

Mike Best: "Sixteen people."

He shakes his head.

Mike Best: "That's adorable."

He climbs the steps.

John Phillips: "There is not a single humble bone in that man's body."

Mark Bravo: "He'd probably tell you humility is for people without résumés."

Mike reaches the apron.

He wipes his boots deliberately.

Then steps through the ropes.

He walks directly into the middle of the ring.

The music continues.

Mike slowly turns in a circle, surveying the Philadelphia crowd.

Boos rain down from every direction.

Mike closes his eyes.

Raises his chin.

And smiles.

Mark Bravo: "He likes this reaction more."

John Phillips: "I think you're right."

Mark Bravo: "When Mike first showed up, people were excited to see the legend. Now they're remembering why half the wrestling world spent twenty years wanting to punch him."

Mike opens his eyes.

He walks toward the ropes facing the hard camera.

Raises his Hall of Fame hand again.

And points directly toward himself with his thumb.

Mike Best: "MIKE."

He taps his chest.

Mike Best: "FUCKING."

Another tap.

Mike Best: "BEST."

Philadelphia responds with another torrent of boos.

John Phillips: "Message received."

Mark Bravo: "Hard to misunderstand."

Mike steps back toward the center of the ring.

He rolls his neck.

Then begins loosening his wrists.

John Phillips: "And beneath all the arrogance, all the language, all the history, you cannot forget what Mike Best actually is once the bell rings."

Mark Bravo: "One of the best technical wrestlers alive."

John Phillips: "MMA-style striking. Suplexes from virtually every position. Arm bars. Chokes. Ground-and-pound. And if

he hits I Knead a Hero—"

Mark Bravo: "Nobody gets up."

John Phillips: "It has never been kicked out of."

Mike looks toward the entranceway.

His expression becomes more serious.

Mark Bravo: "And Valkyrie Knox is not some undersized opponent who's going to be intimidated because Mike Best has a Hall of Fame ring."

John Phillips: "Absolutely not. Valkyrie is a former strongwoman competitor. A Muay Thai grappler. One hundred eighty-two pounds of raw physical power."

Mark Bravo: "And The Empire badly needs this one."

John Phillips: "Trey Mack is out."

Mark Bravo: "Clovis Black is out."

John Phillips: "Valkyrie Knox is their third attempt tonight."

Mike hears the commentary through the arena noise.

Or perhaps he simply has the same thought.

Either way, he looks directly toward the camera again.

Mike Best: "Third time ain't the charm."

He grins.

Mike Best: "Not against me."

Mike backs into his corner.

He leans against the turnbuckles with both arms stretched casually across the top ropes.

Completely relaxed.

Completely arrogant.

Completely convinced the outcome is already decided.

John Phillips: "Mike Best wants back into the UTA Championship picture."

Mark Bravo: "And apparently he intends to walk through Valkyrie Knox to get there."

John Phillips: "The question is whether the Son of GOD has underestimated the Iron Valkyrie."

Mike's music begins to fade.

He keeps his eyes fixed on the entranceway.

Waiting.

The arena remains dim as Mike Best leans back in his corner, waiting.

Then the lights shift.

Dark purple washes across the Xfinity Mobile Arena.

A low rumble of thunder rolls through the building.

Mike's expression barely changes.

Then a war-horn BLARES through the speakers.

John Phillips: "And here comes The Empire's third chance tonight."

Smoke begins pouring across the stage.

The opening of "You Should See Me in a Crown" by Billie Eilish hits.

Valkyrie Knoxx steps through the smoke.

Steel-spiked gauntlet raised toward the rafters.

Eyes fixed on the ring.

No smile.

No hesitation.

No concern whatsoever about the man waiting for her.

Mark Bravo: "Well, if Mike Best was hoping she'd be intimidated, he can go ahead and cross that off the list."

John Phillips: "Valkyrie Knoxx does not scare easily."

Mark Bravo: "I don't know if she scares at all."

Valkyrie lowers the gauntlet.

Then begins walking down the entranceway.

Slow.

Deliberate.

Every step heavy with purpose.

John Phillips: "Five-foot-ten, one hundred eighty-two pounds. Former strongwoman competitor. Muay Thai background. Valkyrie Knoxx is not walking into this match physically overmatched in the way many people would be against Mike Best."

Mark Bravo: "Mike has the size advantage, sure. But Valkyrie is a powerhouse. She can throw people around, she can strike, and she has no problem making a match ugly."

Mike remains in the corner.

He watches her approach.

Then slowly starts applauding.

One clap.

Another.

Slow.

Condescending.

John Phillips: "Oh, come on."

Mark Bravo: "He's welcoming her."

John Phillips: "He's mocking her."

Valkyrie notices.

Her eyes narrow.

But she never breaks stride.

John Phillips: "And as we've said, The Empire has already watched Trey Mack and Clovis Black fail to qualify tonight."

Mark Bravo: "Which means there's pressure on Valkyrie whether she admits it or not."

John Phillips: "A win here puts The Empire into Ring King."

Mark Bravo: "A loss makes them zero-for-three."

Valkyrie reaches ringside.

She stops near the bottom of the steps.

Looks up at Mike.

Mike looks back down at her.

He mouths something.

The camera catches it.

Mike Best: "Good luck."

Then he laughs.

John Phillips: "He's insufferable."

Valkyrie climbs the steps.

She steps onto the apron.

Mike finally pushes himself away from the turnbuckles.

The referee immediately steps toward him.

Mark Bravo: "Referee already knows Mike's looking for trouble."

Valkyrie steps through the ropes.

Mike remains several feet away.

She walks toward the center.

Raises the steel-spiked gauntlet one more time.

The war-horn sounds again.

Then she removes the gauntlet.

A ringside attendant takes it through the ropes.

John Phillips: "And now it's just Valkyrie Knoxx."

Mark Bravo: "Which is plenty."

Valkyrie turns toward Mike.

The two stand across from each other.

Mike smirks.

Valkyrie does not.

John Phillips: "This is an interesting dynamic. Both heels. Both incredibly confident. Neither one of them particularly interested in earning anybody's approval."

Mark Bravo: "And neither one's going to apologize for hurting the other."

Mike steps forward.

The referee puts an arm out to stop him.

Mike looks at the arm.

Then at the referee.

He smirks.

Mike Best: "Relax."

Mike then looks directly at Valkyrie.

He points at her.

Then at himself.

Mike Best: "Let's get one thing straight."

The referee warns him to back up.

Mike ignores him for another second.

Mike Best: "I don't care that you're a woman."

The crowd reacts.

Valkyrie's expression hardens.

Mike Best: "I've already been the DREAM Women's Champion."

Mike spreads his arms.

Mike Best: "Been there."

He points down toward Valkyrie.

Mike Best: "Done that."

Boos rain down.

John Phillips: "There it is."

Mark Bravo: "He really will brag about anything."

Mike taps his Hall of Fame ring.

Mike Best: "You're not special."

Valkyrie takes one step forward.

The referee immediately gets between them.

Mike laughs.

Valkyrie leans around the referee.

Valkyrie Knoxx: "Kneel."

Mike's smile gets wider.

Valkyrie Knox: "Or be broken."

Mark Bravo: "Okay. I like this."

John Phillips: "Of course you do."

Mike leans around the referee from the other side.

Mike Best: "You know who I am?"

Valkyrie doesn't answer.

Mike points to himself again.

Mike Best: "I'm Mike fucking Best."

The crowd boos even louder.

John Phillips: "Mike Best has made his attitude very clear tonight."

Mark Bravo: "He doesn't see this as man versus woman. He sees this as Mike Best versus somebody standing between him and the UTA Championship."

John Phillips: "And that may actually be the most honest thing about him."

The referee finally forces Mike back toward his corner.

Mike raises both hands.

Still smiling.

Valkyrie backs toward hers.

Her eyes never leave him.

John Phillips: "Valkyrie brings raw power, grappling strength and some very dangerous Muay Thai into this match."

Mark Bravo: "Mike brings about thirty years of accumulated bad habits and enough technical wrestling to ruin anybody's night."

John Phillips: "And let's not forget that Valkyrie has faced some of UTA's toughest competitors. She's been Women's Champion. She's gone to war with Marie Van Claudio, Susanita Ybanez, Bianca Page, Sol Azteca. She is not entering this match as some novelty opponent."

Mark Bravo: "Mike doesn't think she is."

John Phillips: "No."

Mark Bravo: "He just thinks she's going to lose."

Valkyrie rolls her shoulders.

Mike bounces lightly on his feet.

The difference in their approaches is immediate.

Valkyrie looks like she's preparing to lift something heavy and break it.

Mike looks like he's preparing for a fight in a cage.

John Phillips: "The Empire needs a win."

Mark Bravo: "Mike Best needs to prove something."

John Phillips: "And only one of them gets into Ring King."

The referee checks both competitors.

Mike nods impatiently.

Valkyrie gives one short nod.

The referee turns toward the timekeeper.

John Phillips: "Valkyrie Knoxx. Mike Best."

Mark Bravo: "This could get nasty."

The referee signals for the bell.

DING! DING! DING!

John Phillips: "And here we go!"

Mike Best immediately raises his hands into a compact fighting stance.

Valkyrie Knoxx does the same.

Neither competitor rushes forward.

For several seconds, they circle.

Mark Bravo: "And this may be more technical than people expect at first."

John Phillips: "Both of these competitors have legitimate striking and grappling backgrounds. Valkyrie with Muay Thai and strongwoman competition, Mike Best with decades of MMA-influenced professional wrestling."

Mike reaches forward.

Valkyrie swats the hand away.

Mike smirks.

They circle again.

Mike throws a quick low kick toward Valkyrie's thigh.

THWACK!

Valkyrie absorbs it.

Then fires one back.

THWACK!

Mike's leg shifts beneath him.

Mark Bravo: "Okay."

Mike looks down at his leg.

Then back at Valkyrie.

The smile fades just a little.

John Phillips: "Valkyrie letting Mike know immediately that she can strike with him."

Mike moves forward.

Jab.

Valkyrie blocks.

Another jab.

Blocked.

Mike suddenly changes levels and shoots for a leg!

Valkyrie sprawls!

John Phillips: "Good defense from Knoxx!"

Mike keeps driving.

Valkyrie hooks around his waist.

She tries to pull him upward.

Mike immediately transitions.

He spins around behind her.

Waistlock!

Mark Bravo: "That's where Mike is dangerous. The first attempt doesn't work, he's already moved to the second."

Mike tries a German suplex.

Valkyrie blocks it.

She hooks one leg around his.

Mike tries again.

Nothing.

John Phillips: "Valkyrie is too strong to simply throw around."

Valkyrie peels Mike's hands apart.

She spins around.

SHORT-ARM LARIAT!

Mike ducks!

He spins behind her again.

BELLY-TO-BACK SUPLEX!

Valkyrie lands hard!

John Phillips: "Mike finally gets her down!"

Mike immediately follows.

He grabs Valkyrie's arm.

Fujiwara armbar!

Mark Bravo: "And there's no wasted time."

Valkyrie grimaces.

Mike pulls backward on the arm.

Then grinds his knee into the shoulder.

John Phillips: "Best immediately attacking the arm."

Mark Bravo: "Take away that power. Valkyrie likes throwing people around. Harder to do that with one arm."

Valkyrie plants her free hand against the canvas.

She starts pushing upward.

Mike increases the pressure.

Valkyrie continues rising.

John Phillips: "Look at the strength!"

Valkyrie gets onto one knee.

Then her feet.

Mike is still attached to the arm!

Valkyrie reaches around with her free hand.

She grabs Mike.

And lifts him off the canvas!

Mark Bravo: "Oh boy."

Valkyrie throws Mike forward!

Mike rolls across the mat and springs back to his feet.

Valkyrie charges—

RUNNING BIG BOOT!

Mike ducks!

Valkyrie spins around.

Mike fires a kick into her ribs!

Then another!

High kick toward the head—

Valkyrie catches the leg!

John Phillips: "Caught!"

Valkyrie yanks Mike toward her.

SHORT-ARM LARIAT!

THIS ONE CONNECTS!

Mike gets turned inside out!

John Phillips: "Valkyrie just took his head off!"

Valkyrie covers.

ONE!

Mike kicks out quickly.

Mark Bravo: "Only one, but Mike felt that."

Valkyrie grabs Mike around the waist.

She deadlifts him off the mat!

GERMAN SUPLEX!

Mike lands high across his shoulders!

John Phillips: "Deadlift German!"

Valkyrie keeps the waistlock.

She pulls Mike back up.

Mark Bravo: "She's not finished."

Mike fires an elbow backward!

Another!

Another!

Valkyrie's grip loosens.

Mike spins around.

ELBOW!

Valkyrie answers with one of her own!

Mike fires another!

Valkyrie responds!

John Phillips: "They're trading now!"

Mike!

Valkyrie!

Mike!

Valkyrie!

Mark Bravo: "This is getting ugly fast."

Mike suddenly drives a knee into Valkyrie's ribs!

Then another!

He grabs behind her head.

KNEE TO THE FACE!

Valkyrie staggers.

John Phillips: "Mike starting to take over in the striking exchange!"

Mike fires a low kick.

Another.

Valkyrie swings wildly.

Mike ducks.

He catches the arm.

Russian legsweep!

Valkyrie hits the mat!

Mike immediately transitions into an armbar!

Mark Bravo: "Again! Mike is constantly moving from strike to takedown to submission."

Valkyrie clasps her hands together to prevent full extension.

Mike pulls.

Valkyrie holds.

John Phillips: "Valkyrie defending the armbar!"

Mike looks at her.

Then toward the crowd.

He smiles.

Mike Best: "I told you!"

He pulls harder.

Mike Best: "DREAM WOMEN'S CHAMPION!"

The crowd erupts in boos.

John Phillips: "Oh, for God's sake."

Mark Bravo: "Historical accuracy matters."

Valkyrie's expression changes.

She looks furious.

She twists toward Mike.

Then throws a heavy forearm with her free arm!

It catches Mike across the jaw!

Mike releases the hold.

John Phillips: "Maybe he should have kept his mouth shut."

Valkyrie gets back to her feet.

Mike rises.

Valkyrie charges!

CORNER BODY AVALANCHE!

Mike gets crushed against the turnbuckles!

Mark Bravo: "That's one hundred eighty-two pounds coming full speed!"

Valkyrie backs away.

Mike slumps slightly in the corner.

Valkyrie charges again—

Mike gets a boot up!

Valkyrie staggers.

Mike explodes out of the corner!

RUNNING SNAP DROPKICK!

Valkyrie falls backward!

John Phillips: "Best with the dropkick!"

Mike immediately follows.

He jumps onto Valkyrie.

MOUNT!

RIGHT HAND!

LEFT!

ELBOW!

Another elbow!

John Phillips: "Mike unloading with ground-and-pound!"

Valkyrie covers up.

Mike keeps striking.

The referee warns him about the back of the head.

Mike stops.

Looks at the referee.

Mike Best: "I know the fucking rules."

John Phillips: "Clearly in a delightful mood tonight."

Mike turns back toward Valkyrie.

Valkyrie suddenly traps one of his arms!

She rolls Mike over!

Now Valkyrie is on top!

Mark Bravo: "Wrong place to be!"

Valkyrie drives a forearm down!

Another!

Another!

Mike covers up.

John Phillips: "And Valkyrie returning the favor!"

Mike bucks his hips.

Valkyrie stays mounted.

Mike shifts sideways.

Valkyrie tries to follow.

Mike catches her wrist!

He rolls!

Both competitors tumble across the canvas!

Mike comes out behind Valkyrie.

He wraps an arm around her neck!

John Phillips: "Rear choke!"

Valkyrie immediately reaches up and grabs Mike's arm.

Mike hooks his legs around her waist.

Mark Bravo: "This is dangerous."

Valkyrie fights the choke.

She gets one knee underneath herself.

Mike tightens the hold.

Valkyrie gets the other foot planted.

John Phillips: "She's standing up with Mike Best on her back!"

Valkyrie rises.

Mike is fully attached to her.

Valkyrie backs toward the corner—

AND CRUSHES MIKE AGAINST THE TURNBUCKLES!

John Phillips: "That breaks the choke!"

Mike releases and falls to the canvas.

Valkyrie turns.

Mike gets to his knees.

Valkyrie charges—

RUNNING BIG BOOT!

It catches Mike across the face!

Mike collapses!

Mark Bravo: "And Mike Best is in trouble!"

Valkyrie grabs him.

She pulls Mike upright.

GORILLA PRESS!

Mike is lifted overhead!

John Phillips: "Look at the strength of Valkyrie Knoxx!"

Mike immediately starts kicking his legs.

Valkyrie holds him there.

Then drops him into the powerslam!

GORILLA-PRESS POWERSLAM!

John Phillips: "SHE PLANTED HIM!"

Valkyrie covers!

ONE!

TWO!

MIKE KICKS OUT!

Mark Bravo: "And now Mike knows this is not going to be some easy walk through a woman because he held a women's title twenty years ago."

Valkyrie rises.

Mike rolls toward the ropes.

She grabs him around the waist.

Mike immediately grabs the top rope.

John Phillips: "Valkyrie looking for another German!"

The referee calls for the break.

Mike clings to the rope.

Valkyrie pulls.

Mike refuses to release.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

FOUR!

Valkyrie releases.

Mike immediately turns—

THUMB TO THE EYE!

John Phillips: "OH COME ON!"

Valkyrie staggers backward, grabbing her face.

Mark Bravo: "There he is."

Mike Best smiles.

He doesn't even pretend it was accidental.

The referee gets in his face.

Mike Best: "What?"

He points toward Valkyrie.

Mike Best: "She blinked."

John Phillips: "Absolutely shameless."

Mike charges.

RUNNING KNEE STRIKE!

Valkyrie gets caught flush!

She drops to one knee.

Mike sees it.

His expression changes immediately.

Mark Bravo: "Oh."

John Phillips: "Mike sees her down."

Valkyrie remains on one knee.

Mike backs toward the ropes.

The Philadelphia crowd realizes exactly what he's thinking.

John Phillips: "Not yet—"

Mike charges—

I KNEED A HERO—

VALKYRIE DIVES OUT OF THE WAY!

John Phillips: "SHE MOVED!"

Mike runs past.

He turns—

VALKYRIE GRABS HIM!

VALKNUT DRIVER!

HIGH-ANGLE SIT-OUT MICHINOKU DRIVER!

John Phillips: "VALKNUT DRIVER!"

Mike is planted!

Valkyrie hooks both legs!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—MIKE KICKS OUT!

John Phillips: "MIKE BEST SURVIVES!"

Valkyrie sits beside him.

For the first time, frustration flashes across her face.

Mark Bravo: "That's the closest The Empire has come all night to securing a qualification."

Valkyrie looks down at Mike.

Then toward the corner.

She gets back to her feet.

John Phillips: "Valkyrie may be looking for Fallen Fury."

Mike rolls onto his stomach.

Valkyrie grabs him.

Pulls him upward.

Mike is barely steady.

Valkyrie starts positioning him for the crucifix powerbomb—

Mike suddenly drops behind her!

John Phillips: "Best escapes!"

Valkyrie turns.

HASHTAG MUTED!

STANDING SUPERKICK!

Valkyrie's head snaps backward!

She staggers into the ropes.

Mark Bravo: "That changed everything!"

Mike charges.

RUNNING FULL-WEIGHT LARIAT!

Valkyrie flips onto her back!

John Phillips: "Mike Best just folded Valkyrie Knoxx!"

Mike falls beside her.

Both competitors remain down.

Mark Bravo: "And now both of them are starting to look like they've been in a fight."

The referee looks at both competitors.

Mike rolls onto one elbow.

Valkyrie turns onto her side.

John Phillips: "Neither competitor has been able to sustain control for long."

Mark Bravo: "Mike has the deeper technical toolbox. Valkyrie has the kind of power that can erase whatever happened in the previous five minutes."

Mike sits up.

Valkyrie begins pushing herself to her knees.

Mike sees her.

His eyes narrow.

John Phillips: "And Mike Best is watching that knee again."

Valkyrie gets one foot underneath herself.

Mike rises as well.

The two competitors stare at one another.

Mike wipes at his mouth.

Looks at his hand.

Then smiles.

Mike Best: "Okay."

Valkyrie raises her fists.

Mike raises his.

John Phillips: "And I think Mike Best finally understands something."

Mark Bravo: "What's that?"

John Phillips: "Valkyrie Knoxx is not here to be part of his highlight reel."

Mike steps forward.

Valkyrie meets him.

Neither throws immediately.

They stand almost nose-to-nose in the center of the ring.

Mike's chest rises and falls.

Valkyrie's jaw is clenched.

John Phillips: "There isn't much arrogance left in Mike Best's expression right now."

Mark Bravo: "Oh, it's still there. Valkyrie just beat some of it out of him."

Mike throws first!

RIGHT HAND!

Valkyrie answers!

Mike!

Valkyrie!

Mike!

Valkyrie!

John Phillips: "Back and forth in the middle of the ring!"

Mike switches to an elbow!

Valkyrie absorbs it and fires a knee into his ribs!

Mike doubles slightly.

Valkyrie grabs the Muay Thai clinch!

Mark Bravo: "Bad position for Mike!"

KNEE!

Another knee!

A third!

Mike gets his forearms between them and forces separation!

Valkyrie immediately kicks him in the thigh!

Mike fires one back!

Valkyrie answers!

John Phillips: "These two are beating the hell out of each other!"

Mike suddenly changes levels!

DOUBLE-LEG TAKEDOWN!

Valkyrie sprawls—

But Mike doesn't continue driving forward.

Instead, he pivots!

Hooks the ankle!

And twists Valkyrie down to the canvas!

John Phillips: "Beautiful transition by Best!"

Mark Bravo: "That's thirty years talking."

Mike immediately dives onto Valkyrie's back.

He snakes an arm underneath her chin!

Valkyrie tucks immediately.

Mike can't get the choke.

So he abandons it.

ELBOW TO THE SIDE OF THE HEAD!

Another!

Another!

John Phillips: "Mike Best just battering Valkyrie from behind!"

The referee warns Mike.

Mike stops.

For exactly one second.

Then drives his forearm across Valkyrie's face and pulls backward!

John Phillips: "Come on!"

Mark Bravo: "That's not a choke."

John Phillips: "He's trying to peel her face off!"

The referee begins counting.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

FOUR!

Mike releases.

Then immediately pats Valkyrie on the back of the head.

Mike Best: "Good effort."

Valkyrie's eyes widen.

Mark Bravo: "That was a mistake."

Valkyrie explodes upward!

Mike barely gets out of the way of a wild elbow!

Valkyrie turns—

Mike fires a kick!

Valkyrie catches it!

She pulls Mike forward—

HEADBUTT!

Mike staggers backward!

John Phillips: "Valkyrie Knoxx is furious!"

Valkyrie charges!

RUNNING SHOULDER BLOCK!

Mike gets launched backward into the turnbuckles!

Valkyrie follows!

CORNER AVALANCHE!

Mike gets crushed!

Mark Bravo: "He wanted to piss her off. Congratulations!"

Valkyrie grabs Mike.

She lifts!

OVERHEAD BELLY-TO-BELLY SUPLEX!

Mike sails across the ring!

John Phillips: "BEST THROWN HALFWAY ACROSS THE RING!"

Mike lands hard.

He rolls toward the opposite corner.

Valkyrie stalks after him.

Mike pulls himself up with the ropes.

Valkyrie charges again—

Mike moves!

Valkyrie slams chest-first into the turnbuckles!

Mike immediately grabs her from behind!

GERMAN SUPLEX!

Valkyrie lands across her shoulders!

Mike maintains the waistlock!

John Phillips: "Best hanging on!"

Mike drags Valkyrie back up.

SECOND GERMAN SUPLEX!

Valkyrie crashes again!

Mike still doesn't release!

Mark Bravo: "He's trying to take the power out of her by dumping her on her head repeatedly."

Mike strains to pull Valkyrie up a third time.

Valkyrie reaches down.

Breaks the grip!

She spins—

ELBOW!

Mike stumbles backward.

Valkyrie charges—

MIKE CATCHES HER!

BELLY-TO-BELLY SUPLEX!

Valkyrie hits hard!

John Phillips: "And Best had the answer!"

Mike scrambles into the cover.

ONE!

TWO!

VALKYRIE KICKS OUT!

Mike immediately grabs her arm.

He twists.

ARM BAR!

John Phillips: "Right back to the arm he targeted earlier!"

Valkyrie clasps her hands.

Mike kicks at the grip.

Once!

Twice!

The hands separate!

Mike extends the arm!

Mark Bravo: "He's got it now!"

Valkyrie grimaces.

The referee asks if she submits.

Valkyrie shakes her head violently.

Mike pulls harder.

Mike Best: "ASK HER!"

John Phillips: "The referee is asking her!"

Valkyrie twists her body.

She manages to get onto her side.

Mike keeps the arm extended.

Valkyrie reaches toward the ropes with her free hand.

Too far.

Mark Bravo: "She's got a long way to go."

Valkyrie plants her feet.

She starts shifting her weight toward Mike.

Mike's shoulders touch the mat!

ONE!

TWO!

Mike releases the armbar!

John Phillips: "Valkyrie forced him to break it!"

Both competitors scramble up.

Mike gets there first.

Valkyrie rises—

HASHTAG MUTED!

SUPERKICK!

Valkyrie staggers!

But does not fall!

John Phillips: "She's still standing!"

Mike looks almost offended.

He fires another superkick!

Valkyrie catches his foot!

Mike's eyes widen.

Valkyrie pulls him in—

CAPTURE SUPLEX!

Mike gets dumped onto his back!

Mark Bravo: "Valkyrie will not go away!"

Valkyrie doesn't cover.

She pulls Mike back up.

Hooks him.

Lifts—

VERTICAL SUPLEX!

But she doesn't drop him!

Valkyrie holds Mike vertically above the canvas!

John Phillips: "Look at this strength!"

Mike hangs upside down.

Five seconds.

Six.

Seven.

Then Mike starts driving knees down into the top of Valkyrie's head!

Mark Bravo: "Mike's fighting upside down!"

Another knee!

Valkyrie's grip weakens.

Mike drops behind her!

He immediately grabs the waist.

DRAGON SUPLEX!

Valkyrie lands high!

John Phillips: "Good God!"

Mike rolls backward onto his knees.

He looks at Valkyrie.

She is already trying to get up.

Mike's expression twists into disbelief.

Mike Best: "Stay the fuck down!"

Valkyrie gets onto one knee.

She looks directly at Mike.

And smiles.

Mark Bravo: "Oh, she shouldn't have done that."

John Phillips: "Mike has spent this entire match disrespecting Valkyrie. I think she's returning the favor."

Mike charges!

I KNEED A HERO—

VALKYRIE CATCHES HIM!

John Phillips: "CAUGHT!"

Mike's knee never reaches her head!

Valkyrie has him around the waist!

She explodes upward!

SPINEBUSTER!

MIKE BEST IS DRIVEN INTO THE CANVAS!

Mark Bravo: "SHE COUNTERED THE KNEE!"

Valkyrie hooks both legs!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—MIKE GETS A SHOULDER UP!

John Phillips: "TWO AND NINE-TENTHS!"

Valkyrie rolls away.

She pounds the mat once.

Then gets back to her feet.

John Phillips: "And Mike Best came within a fraction of a second of becoming The Empire's first qualifying victim tonight!"

Mark Bravo: "Valkyrie has now countered I Kneed a Hero twice. She knows that's the kill shot."

Mike rolls toward the ropes.

He uses them to stand.

Valkyrie comes after him.

Mike reaches through the ropes.

The referee gets between them.

John Phillips: "Mike Best looking for sanctuary in the ropes."

Mike Best: "GET HER BACK!"

The referee forces Valkyrie away.

Mike points toward the referee.

Mike Best: "Do your fucking job!"

John Phillips: "Oh, now he's concerned with the rules."

Mark Bravo: "Rules are extremely important when they're helping Mike Best."

Mike steps away from the ropes.

Valkyrie moves forward.

Mike backs away.

Valkyrie follows.

John Phillips: "And look at this. Mike Best is actually giving ground."

Mike's back reaches the corner.

Valkyrie charges—

MIKE PULLS THE REFEREE INTO THE WAY!

John Phillips: "HEY!"

Valkyrie stops herself just before colliding with the official!

The referee stumbles sideways.

Valkyrie looks toward him for half a second.

That's all Mike needs.

RAKE OF THE EYES!

John Phillips: "AGAIN!"

Valkyrie grabs her face.

Mike immediately hooks her!

GERMAN SUPLEX!

Valkyrie crashes down!

Mike rolls through!

He pulls her up again!

SECOND GERMAN!

Mark Bravo: "Mike's turning this into a car wreck now!"

Mike hangs on.

He drags Valkyrie upright for a third time.

Valkyrie throws an elbow backward!

Mike ducks it!

RELEASE GERMAN SUPLEX!

Valkyrie flips through the air and lands hard!

John Phillips: "Three Germans in succession!"

Mike gets to his feet.

He doesn't cover.

Instead, he stands over Valkyrie.

Breathing heavily.

Looking down at her with open contempt.

Mike Best: "You wanted equality?"

He kicks Valkyrie in the ribs.

Mike Best: "There you fucking go."

John Phillips: "What an absolute piece of garbage."

Mark Bravo: "Mike told us before this started. He doesn't care who is standing across from him."

John Phillips: "There's competing without distinction and then there's being Mike Best."

Mike reaches down.

He pulls Valkyrie up by the wrist.

Valkyrie suddenly fires a forearm!

Mike staggers!

Another forearm!

Mike fires back!

Valkyrie answers!

Mike!

Valkyrie!

Mike!

VALKYRIE WITH A MASSIVE ELBOW!

Mike drops to one knee!

John Phillips: "Knox still has fight!"

Valkyrie grabs him.

She starts lifting Mike into position!

Mark Bravo: "Fallen Fury!"

Mike kicks his legs!

Valkyrie tries to muscle him up!

Mike slips free!

He lands behind her!

Valkyrie turns—

HASHTAG MUTED!

SUPERKICK!

Valkyrie stumbles backward into the ropes!

She rebounds forward!

Mike catches her!

EXPLODER SUPLEX!

Valkyrie crashes into the turnbuckles!

John Phillips: "Valkyrie folded into that corner!"

Mike drops to one knee.

He watches her.

Valkyrie slowly rolls out of the corner.

She gets onto her hands and knees.

Then one knee.

Mark Bravo: "Mike has been waiting for this."

Mike stands.

He backs into the opposite corner.

Valkyrie is still trying to rise.

John Phillips: "Twice already Valkyrie has avoided I Kneed a Hero."

Mark Bravo: "Mike only needs it once."

Mike grips the top ropes behind him.

His eyes are locked onto Valkyrie.

There is no smile anymore.

No joke.

No playing to the crowd.

Just a veteran waiting for the exact moment to kill the fight.

John Phillips: "Valkyrie needs to know where he is."

Valkyrie gets one foot underneath herself.

Then the other.

She turns.

Mike explodes out of the corner—

Valkyrie sees him!

She steps sideways—

Mike adjusts!

He catches her around the head!

Valkyrie shoves him away!

John Phillips: "SHE ESCAPES AGAIN!"

Mike hits the ropes.

Valkyrie charges after him!

Mike rebounds—

Valkyrie swings a lariat!

MIKE DUCKS!

Valkyrie spins around.

Mike stops dead behind her.

Valkyrie turns—

Mike drives a vicious kick into the inside of her knee!

Valkyrie's leg buckles!

She drops to one knee.

Mike freezes.

He sees it.

The entire arena sees it.

Mark Bravo: "There."

Mike takes two steps backward.

Valkyrie realizes where she is.

She tries to stand—

MIKE BEST EXPLODES FORWARD!

I KNEED A HERO!

THE SHINING WIZARD CONNECTS FLUSH!

Valkyrie's head snaps backward!

She collapses flat onto the canvas!

John Phillips: "I KNEED A HERO!"

Mark Bravo: "HE GOT ALL OF IT!"

Mike lands beside her.

He immediately turns.

Looks at Valkyrie.

And for the first time since the opening bell...

The smirk returns.

John Phillips: "Nobody has ever kicked out of that."

Mike crawls toward Valkyrie.

He rolls her onto her back.

Then pauses.

Instead of hooking the leg...

Mike places one hand flat against Valkyrie's chest.

And looks directly into the hard camera.

John Phillips: "Oh, come on, Mike."

The referee drops for the count.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

DING! DING! DING!

The referee immediately signals for the bell.

Mike Best leaves his palm pressed against Valkyrie Knoxx's chest for one extra second.

Just because he can.

Then he pushes himself upright.

John Phillips: "Mike Best is going to Ring King."

Mark Bravo: "And The Empire is officially zero-for-three tonight."

"Pandemonium" begins blasting through the Xfinity Mobile Arena.

The boos come with it.

Mike sits beside Valkyrie for a moment, breathing heavily.

He wipes sweat from his forehead.

Looks down at her.

Then shakes his head.

Mike Best: "Told you."

John Phillips: "For all of Mike Best's arrogance, Valkyrie Knoxx made him work for every bit of this."

Mark Bravo: "Absolutely. She countered I Knead a Hero twice. She nearly put Mike away with the Valknut Driver. She threw him around. She struck with him. That was not easy."

The ring announcer steps forward.

Ring Announcer: "Here is your winner... and advancing to the 2026 Ring King tournament... the Son of GOD... MIKE... BEST!"

Mike rises to his feet.

The referee reaches for his wrist.

Mike pulls it away before the official can raise it.

John Phillips: "Of course."

Mike looks at the referee like he's offended the man even tried.

Mike Best: "I can do it myself."

Mike raises both arms.

Philadelphia responds with another wall of boos.

He turns slowly.

Soaking in every bit of it.

Mark Bravo: "He loves this version of himself."

John Phillips: "I'm not sure anyone else does."

Mike lowers one arm.

With the other, he raises the UTA Hall of Fame ring toward the camera.

Then points at it.

Mike Best: "Hall of Fame."

He points toward himself.

Mike Best: "Ring King."

Mike pauses.

Then gestures around his waist.

Mike Best: "Next."

John Phillips: "And we know exactly what that means."

Mark Bravo: "Chris Ross."

John Phillips: "Mike Best came to UTA because he wanted the UTA Championship. He failed to leave One Last Stop with it. Ring King now gives him another road back."

The giant screen above the entranceway changes.

RING KING 2026

QUALIFIED

MIKE BEST

Mike turns toward it.

He stares at his name for a moment.

Then laughs.

Mike Best: "No shit."

John Phillips: "Language."

Mark Bravo: "You're picking your battles awfully late tonight."

Behind Mike, Valkyrie begins to move.

She rolls onto one side.

The referee notices and immediately moves toward her.

Mike hears the movement.

He turns.

Valkyrie gets onto one elbow.

Mike watches.

John Phillips: "Mike, you've won. Leave it alone."

Valkyrie pushes herself to a seated position.

Her eyes find Mike.

Mike smiles.

He walks toward her.

Mark Bravo: "He isn't leaving it alone."

The referee immediately steps between them.

Mike stops.

Looks around the referee.

Mike Best: "Hey."

Valkyrie says nothing.

Mike Best: "You did good."

Valkyrie's stare hardens.

Mike nods.

Mike Best: "For third place."

Valkyrie lunges forward!

The referee barely manages to hold her back!

John Phillips: "Mike Best is deliberately provoking her!"

Mike throws both hands up.

Laughing.

Mike Best: "Whoa! Easy!"

Valkyrie tries to shove past the referee.

Mike backs toward the ropes.

Mark Bravo: "He's got what he wanted. He's gotten inside her head."

John Phillips: "He's already won the match! Why does he need anything else?"

Mark Bravo: "Because he's Mike fucking Best."

Mike steps through the ropes.

He drops to the floor.

Valkyrie finally stops fighting the referee.

She stands in the middle of the ring.

Staring down at Mike.

Mike looks back up at her.

Then taps the side of his head.

Mike Best: "Experience."

He turns away.

John Phillips: "As much as I hate to admit it, that's ultimately what decided this match."

Mark Bravo: "Yep."

John Phillips: "Valkyrie had the power. She had Mike hurt. She had the answer for his finish twice."

Mark Bravo: "But Mike adjusted."

John Phillips: "The inside kick to the knee created the opening, and the third attempt at I Knead a Hero ended it."

Mark Bravo: "One mistake. That's all Mike Best needs."

Mike starts walking up the aisle.

He passes the hard camera.

Then abruptly stops.

Turns toward it.

Mike Best: "Hey, Ross."

The crowd reacts immediately.

Mike steps closer to the lens.

Mike Best: "You watching?"

He waits.

Smiles.

Mike Best: "Good."

Mike points toward himself.

Mike Best: "I'm still Mike fucking Best."

He points toward the Ring King logo.

Mike Best: "And now I'm coming through this."

Another gesture around his waist.

Mike Best: "To get back to you."

Mike grins.

Mike Best: "Try not to lose my belt before I get there."

Mike turns and walks away.

John Phillips: "There it is. Mike Best making his intentions crystal clear."

Mark Bravo: "He doesn't want Ring King because he cares about being Ring King."

John Phillips: "He wants what comes with it."

Mark Bravo: "Chris Ross."

Mike reaches the stage.

He turns around one final time.

Raises his Hall of Fame hand.

Middle finger extended.

Then disappears through the curtain.

The camera returns to Valkyrie inside the ring.

She's standing now.

Still angry.

Still staring toward the entranceway.

John Phillips: "And for The Empire, this has become a disastrous night."

Mark Bravo: "Three shots."

John Phillips: "Trey Mack."

Mark Bravo: "Eliminated."

John Phillips: "Clovis Black."

Mark Bravo: "Eliminated."

John Phillips: "Valkyrie Knoxx."

Mark Bravo: "Eliminated."

Valkyrie steps through the ropes and drops to the floor.

John Phillips: "The Empire will not put a single qualifier into the tournament from tonight's matches."

Mark Bravo: "And I cannot imagine Marie Van Claudio is going to be thrilled about that."

Valkyrie starts toward the back.

No theatrics.

No acknowledgment of the crowd.

Just anger.

John Phillips: "Meanwhile, Mike Best joins Kirsty McKinney, Bianca Page and Lindsey Lothario among tonight's qualifiers."

Mark Bravo: "And Mike Best just became one of the most dangerous names in the entire field."

Come Get It

Segment

We cut backstage.

Melissa Cartwright stands in the interview area.

Beside her is the UTA International Champion.

"Beautiful" Bobby Dean.

The championship rests over his shoulder.

Bobby is looking down at it.

Not polishing it.

Not talking to it.

Just looking.

Melissa Cartwright: "Bobby, earlier tonight I spoke with Eric Dane Junior."

Bobby nods.

Bobby Dean: "I saw."

Melissa Cartwright: "You did?"

Bobby Dean: "Yep."

Bobby looks toward the camera.

Bobby Dean: "They got TVs back here."

Melissa almost smiles.

Bobby Dean: "Pretty nice ones too."

A beat.

Bobby Dean: "Like... really nice."

Melissa Cartwright: "Bobby."

Bobby Dean: "Right."

He adjusts the International Championship on his shoulder.

Melissa Cartwright: "Eric says he was trying to protect you at One Last Stop."

Bobby's expression changes.

Melissa Cartwright: "He says Lindsey Lothario was close to taking this championship..."

Melissa gestures toward the title.

Melissa Cartwright: "...and that his involvement is the reason you're still champion."

Bobby looks down again.

Bobby Dean: "Maybe."

Melissa looks surprised.

Melissa Cartwright: "Maybe?"

Bobby Dean: "Yeah."

Bobby shrugs.

Bobby Dean: "Maybe Lindsey would've beat me."

Bobby Dean: "I don't know."

Bobby Dean: "Nobody does."

He looks at Melissa.

Bobby Dean: "That's kinda why you wrestle the match."

Melissa nods.

Bobby Dean: "But I know something."

Bobby's hand settles over the faceplate.

Bobby Dean: "I wanted to find out."

Pause.

Bobby Dean: "For the first time in a long time..."

He smiles faintly.

Bobby Dean: "...I really wanted to find out."

Melissa Cartwright: "What do you mean?"

Bobby takes a breath.

Bobby Dean: "People laugh at me, Missy."

Melissa Cartwright: "Melissa."

Bobby Dean: "Yeah."

He points at her.

Bobby Dean: "See? That."

Melissa can't help herself this time.

A tiny smile.

Bobby Dean: "People laugh."

Bobby's own smile fades.

Bobby Dean: "And usually..."

He shrugs.

Bobby Dean: "...I'm laughing too."

Bobby Dean: "Because I'm funny."

Bobby thinks about that.

Bobby Dean: "Sometimes on purpose."

A beat.

Bobby Dean: "But somewhere along the way..."

He looks at the championship.

Bobby Dean: "...I started wondering if maybe being funny was all anybody thought I could do."

Melissa remains quiet.

Bobby Dean: "Then Victorious happened."

Bobby's eyes drift somewhere beyond the camera.

Bobby Dean: "I climbed that ladder."

A little disbelief enters his voice.

Bobby Dean: "Me."

Bobby Dean: "Bobby Dean."

Bobby Dean: "On a ladder."

He shakes his head.

Bobby Dean: "Terrible idea, by the way."

Bobby Dean: "My knees still think about it."

Melissa smiles softly.

Bobby Dean: "But I got up there."

Bobby Dean: "And I almost won."

Pause.

Bobby Dean: "And everybody started chanting my name."

Bobby swallows.

Bobby Dean: "They weren't laughing."

The mood shifts.

Bobby Dean: "Mikey told me I earned this."

His hand pats the International Championship.

Bobby Dean: "Eli Creed told me he saw a champion."

Bobby Dean: "And for a while..."

Bobby looks down.

Bobby Dean: "...I thought maybe they were just being nice."

Melissa Cartwright: "Do you still think that?"

Bobby is quiet.

Then slowly shakes his head.

Bobby Dean: "No."

Simple.

Certain.

Bobby Dean: "I don't."

Melissa lets that sit.

Melissa Cartwright: "Eric does."

Bobby nods.

Bobby Dean: "I know."

Melissa Cartwright: "He said you're playing champion."

Bobby's jaw tightens slightly.

Melissa Cartwright: "He said you've had your fun."

Melissa Cartwright: "And that at Ring King..."

Pause.

Melissa Cartwright: "...playtime ends."

Bobby stares down at the championship.

Several seconds pass.

Bobby Dean: "Eric talks a lot."

Melissa raises an eyebrow.

Bobby Dean: "Like..."

Bobby gestures vaguely.

Bobby Dean: "...a lot."

Bobby Dean: "I talk a lot too."

He thinks.

Bobby Dean: "But usually I'm saying important stuff."

Melissa Cartwright: "Such as?"

Bobby Dean: "Where we're eating."

Melissa sighs.

Bobby Dean: "That's important."

Then Bobby becomes serious again.

Bobby Dean: "But Eric..."

He looks directly into the camera.

Bobby Dean: "...you keep telling everybody who Bobby Dean is."

Bobby Dean: "The joke."

Bobby Dean: "The fat guy."

Bobby Dean: "The guy who doesn't belong."

Bobby Dean: "The guy who should be grateful you let him hang around."

Bobby pauses.

Bobby Dean: "And maybe I let you talk to me like that for too long."

He nods slowly.

Bobby Dean: "That's on me."

Bobby Dean: "Because I liked you."

A beat.

Bobby Dean: "I still kinda do."

Melissa looks toward him.

Bobby Dean: "Your dad and me..."

Bobby trails off.

He shakes his head.

Bobby Dean: "Doesn't matter."

That's unusual for Bobby.

Bobby Dean: "I kept looking at you and seeing somebody I wanted to be family with."

Bobby Dean: "And I think you kept looking at me..."

Pause.

Bobby Dean: "...and seeing somebody beneath you."

Melissa remains silent.

Bobby Dean: "Then at One Last Stop..."

Bobby slowly raises his right fist.

He looks at it.

Bobby Dean: "...I hit you."

He flexes the fingers.

Bobby Dean: "Still kinda hurts."

A tiny smile.

Bobby Dean: "Mikey says that's normal."

Then the smile disappears.

Bobby Dean: "But you know what didn't hurt?"

Bobby looks directly toward the lens.

Bobby Dean: "Standing up for myself."

Pause.

Bobby Dean: "That felt pretty good."

Melissa Cartwright: "Eric says there's a difference between surprising him with one punch and wrestling him when he knows you're coming."

Bobby nods immediately.

Bobby Dean: "He's right."

Melissa looks surprised again.

Bobby Dean: "There is."

Bobby turns more fully toward the camera.

Bobby Dean: "At Ring King..."

He pats the championship.

Bobby Dean: "...you're gonna know I'm coming."

Pause.

Bobby Dean: "You're gonna know exactly where I'll be."

Bobby Dean: "Standing across the ring."

Bobby Dean: "With this."

He lifts the International Championship slightly.

Bobby Dean: "And everybody's gonna know the rules."

Bobby Dean: "Everybody's gonna know what's at stake."

Bobby Dean: "And you won't have any excuse afterward."

A beat.

Bobby Dean: "Neither will I."

Melissa Cartwright: "Are you afraid of losing the championship?"

Bobby immediately looks toward her.

He thinks about the question.

Bobby Dean: "Yeah."

Melissa wasn't expecting that.

Bobby Dean: "Very."

Bobby looks down at the belt.

Bobby Dean: "I love this thing."

He hugs it slightly against his chest.

Bobby Dean: "It's shiny."

A beat.

Bobby Dean: "It's heavy."

Bobby Dean: "It makes airport security complicated."

Melissa smiles.

Bobby Dean: "But mostly..."

His voice softens.

Bobby Dean: "...when I look at it, I remember that maybe everybody was wrong."

Pause.

Bobby Dean: "Maybe I was wrong."

Bobby Dean: "Maybe Bobby Dean can be more than the funny guy."

He takes a breath.

Bobby Dean: "So yeah."

Bobby Dean: "I'm afraid of losing it."

Then he looks toward the camera again.

Bobby Dean: "Which means you're gonna have to take it."

A beat.

Bobby Dean: "Lindsey tried."

Bobby Dean: "And I was ready to find out if they could."

Bobby Dean: "You decided I wasn't."

Bobby shakes his head.

Bobby Dean: "You don't get to decide that anymore."

Melissa watches him carefully.

Bobby Dean: "At Ring King, Eric..."

Bobby takes the championship off his shoulder.

He holds it against his stomach with both hands.

Bobby Dean: "...you want this?"

He lifts it toward the camera.

Bobby Dean: "Come get it."

There is no comedy in that sentence.

Bobby Dean: "And if you beat me..."

He nods.

Bobby Dean: "...I'll shake your hand."

Bobby Dean: "I'll tell you that you were better."

Bobby Dean: "I'll probably cry."

A beat.

Bobby Dean: "Definitely gonna need ice cream."

Melissa almost laughs.

Bobby Dean: "But you're gonna have to beat me."

His voice firms again.

Bobby Dean: "Not embarrass me."

Bobby Dean: "Not talk down to me."

Bobby Dean: "Not tell me who I am."

Bobby Dean: "Beat me."

Pause.

Bobby Dean: "One."

Bobby Dean: "Two."

Bobby Dean: "Three."

Bobby looks directly into the lens.

Bobby Dean: "Until then..."

He puts the International Championship back over his shoulder.

Bobby Dean: "...I'm the champion."

A small smile forms.

Bobby Dean: "Pretty nice, huh?"

Melissa smiles now.

Melissa Cartwright: "One final question."

Bobby Dean: "Okay."

Melissa Cartwright: "Eric told you to enjoy the next two months pretending."

Bobby's smile slowly fades.

Melissa Cartwright: "Any response?"

Bobby thinks.

Then gives a small shrug.

Bobby Dean: "Sure."

He looks toward the camera.

Bobby Dean: "Eric..."

A beat.

Bobby Dean: "You spent a long time telling me I was a joke."

Bobby Dean: "And I believed you."

Pause.

Bobby Dean: "That's over."

Bobby pats the championship.

Bobby Dean: "So you enjoy the next two months too."

His expression grows unusually serious.

Bobby Dean: "Because right now..."

Pause.

Bobby Dean: "...you're still pretending you already beat me."

Bobby turns and begins walking out of frame.

He gets several steps.

Then comes back.

Bobby Dean: "Did we get catering yet?"

Melissa closes her eyes.

Melissa Cartwright: "Bobby."

Bobby Dean: "Right. Sorry."

He walks away again.

Melissa watches him go with a faint smile before turning toward the camera.

Melissa Cartwright: "Bobby Dean versus Eric Dane Junior. International Championship. Ring King. September twenty-sixth."

She pauses.

Melissa Cartwright: "And perhaps for Bobby Dean... something considerably more than a championship is on the line."

Fade out.

One More Chance

Segment

No content entered.

Maxwell Jett vs. Kairo Bey

Match

The camera returns to a wide shot of the Xfinity Mobile Arena.

The Ring King logo hangs above the ring as the Philadelphia crowd remains loud following Mike Best's victory.

John Phillips: "Four qualifying matches down. One remains."

Mark Bravo: "And this is the big one."

The main event graphic fills the screen.

RING KING QUALIFYING MATCH

MAXWELL JETT vs. KAIRO BEY

John Phillips: "Former UTA Champion Maxwell Jett against Kairo Bey of the Creed Method."

Mark Bravo: "And there is a whole lot riding on this one for both men."

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett entered One Last Stop as UTA Champion. He left Toronto without the championship after Chris Ross pinned him in the Triple Threat Match."

Mark Bravo: "Which, if you've spent more than thirty seconds around Maxwell since then, you already know he considers one of the greatest injustices in human history."

John Phillips: "Meanwhile, the Creed Method already has something to celebrate tonight."

The camera briefly cuts toward the entranceway.

John Phillips: "Lindsey Lothario defeated Clovis Black earlier this evening and qualified for Ring King."

Mark Bravo: "And now Kairo Bey has a chance to put a second Creed Method representative into the tournament."

The lights begin to fade.

The arena falls into darkness.

Then a soft golden light slowly begins glowing across the stage.

John Phillips: "And here comes the Creed Method."

A single spotlight appears at center stage.

Eli Creed stands beneath it.

Hands clasped behind his back.

Perfect posture.

A calm smile on his face.

The opening of "Glory and Gore" by Lorde begins playing through the Xfinity Mobile Arena.

The Philadelphia crowd immediately responds with boos.

Eli closes his eyes.

He takes a slow breath.

Almost as if the hatred surrounding him is something peaceful.

Mark Bravo: "I still don't like when he does that."

John Phillips: "You're not supposed to."

Eli opens his eyes.

Then steps slightly to the side.

The light behind him intensifies.

And Kairo Bey emerges through the curtain.

Blue.

Pink.

White.

Neon strobes begin flashing across the stage, cutting through the soft gold surrounding Creed.

Kairo stops beside him.

The Neon Ace rolls his shoulders.

Light on his feet.

Focused.

But that natural confidence is still there.

Then another figure steps through the curtain.

Lindsey Lothario.

Still showing the effects of their match earlier tonight.

But standing tall.

Qualified.

Victorious.

John Phillips: "And Lindsey Lothario joining them."

Mark Bravo: "That's visual motivation right there."

John Phillips: "Lindsey already knows their place in Ring King is secure."

Mark Bravo: "Now they're walking Kairo toward the same opportunity."

The three stand together at the top of the ramp.

Eli in front.

Kairo just behind his right shoulder.

Lindsey positioned on Kairo's opposite side.

A leader.

A student.

And proof of concept.

John Phillips: "This group has become one of the more fascinating developments in UTA."

Mark Bravo: "Look at Lindsey tonight. Months ago, they were all flash, all personality, all performance."

John Phillips: "And tonight they defeated Clovis Black in one of the toughest matches we've seen."

Mark Bravo: "That's what Eli sells. Break. Bend. Build."

Eli turns toward Kairo.

He says something quietly.

Kairo listens.

Then nods.

Lindsey places one hand against Kairo's shoulder.

Kairo looks toward them.

Lindsey gives him a short nod.

No smile.

No joke.

Just acknowledgement.

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey has always been a naturally gifted athlete."

Mark Bravo: "One of the smoothest guys in this company."

John Phillips: "Springboards. Rapid kicks. Sudden cutters. He can turn one hesitation into a match-ending sequence."

Mark Bravo: "And unlike Lindsey, I don't think Eli is trying to completely strip away Kairo's style."

John Phillips: "No. Kairo's speed and creativity are exactly what make him dangerous."

Mark Bravo: "Creed just wants to make sure all that electricity is going somewhere useful."

Eli begins walking down the aisle.

Kairo follows.

Lindsey falls into step beside him.

As they move, the golden lighting begins giving way to Kairo's neon blue, pink and white.

Kairo's pace has rhythm.

Not quite a dance.

Not quite a strut.

Something effortless in between.

John Phillips: "And this is a massive opportunity for Kairo Bey."

Mark Bravo: "He's never been UTA Champion."

John Phillips: "His opponent has."

Mark Bravo: "Which makes tonight a chance to do more than qualify."

John Phillips: "Beat Maxwell Jett, and nobody can dismiss Kairo as simply another talented prospect."

Mark Bravo: "You beat the former champion in the main event, you're not a prospect anymore."

Kairo glances toward the hard camera.

A slight grin.

He raises one finger toward it.

Kairo Bey: "Switch it on."

The neon lights flash brighter with the beat.

John Phillips: "The Neon Ace has always said he doesn't chase the spotlight."

Mark Bravo: "He switches it on."

Kairo continues toward ringside.

Behind him, Lindsey watches the crowd.

They catch sight of the giant Ring King graphic above the ring.

A small smirk appears.

Their name is already part of that tournament.

Kairo looks toward the same graphic.

Then back toward the ring.

John Phillips: "Imagine what this group could do if Kairo qualifies."

Mark Bravo: "Two people in the bracket."

John Phillips: "And potentially two opportunities for Eli Creed to influence how this tournament unfolds."

Mark Bravo: "You're assuming he isn't already thinking six steps ahead."

John Phillips: "I'm certain he is."

The trio reaches ringside.

Eli stops first.

Kairo stops beside him.

Lindsey stands just behind them.

Kairo looks up at the ring.

Then toward Eli.

Eli turns to him.

Eli Creed: "He will want you angry."

Kairo listens.

Eli Creed: "He will want you impatient."

Kairo nods.

Eli Creed: "He will want you chasing him."

Eli gives that faint, unsettling smile.

Eli Creed: "Don't."

Kairo's grin fades.

Focus replaces it.

John Phillips: "And that may be the single best piece of advice you can give anyone facing Maxwell Jett."

Mark Bravo: "Max lives on frustration. He wants you angry. He wants you reaching. Then he takes something away from you."

Kairo climbs onto the apron.

He grabs the top rope.

Then slingshots himself cleanly into the ring.

He lands on his feet.

Immediately takes two quick steps toward the ropes.

Springs onto the second rope.

And raises one hand in a sharp salute toward Philadelphia.

The crowd responds loudly.

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey has an ability to make difficult things look effortless."

Mark Bravo: "That's why you cannot blink against him."

Kairo drops lightly back to the canvas.

Lindsey steps onto the apron.

They don't enter the ring.

Instead, they lean through the ropes.

Kairo approaches.

Lindsey says something quietly to him.

Kairo nods.

Then Lindsey bumps their fist against Kairo's.

John Phillips: "A little encouragement from someone who has already been through exactly what Kairo is about to face tonight."

Mark Bravo: "Not Maxwell Jett specifically, but the pressure of knowing one match determines whether you're in or out."

Lindsey drops back to the floor.

Eli moves into position near Kairo's corner.

Lindsey takes the opposite side of that corner.

The two effectively flank Kairo from the floor.

John Phillips: "And make no mistake, Kairo has company out here."

Mark Bravo: "Eli Creed and Lindsey Lothario."

John Phillips: "Which raises a question about Maxwell Jett."

Mark Bravo: "First Class."

John Phillips: "Exactly. Jacoby Jacobs and Darian Darrington have been at Maxwell's side throughout his championship reign."

Mark Bravo: "And after what happened at One Last Stop, you know those two are going to be watching their guy closely."

Kairo rolls his shoulders.

He bounces lightly from foot to foot.

His eyes remain fixed on the entranceway.

The neon lighting begins to fade.

Eli looks toward the stage.

Lindsey does the same.

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey has his chance."

Mark Bravo: "Now comes the problem."

John Phillips: "The former UTA Champion."

Kairo stops bouncing.

He settles into his corner.

And waits for Maxwell Jett.

Kairo Bey waits inside the ring.

Eli Creed stands outside one side of his corner.

Lindsey Lothario stands on the other.

The neon lighting fades.

For several seconds, the Xfinity Mobile Arena sits in darkness.

Then—

A single white spotlight slams down onto the center of the stage.

Like a red-carpet flash.

John Phillips: "And here comes the former UTA Champion."

The opening arena-rock riff of "Gold Standard" begins to play.

Heavy trap drums drop underneath it.

The Philadelphia crowd immediately erupts in boos.

Mark Bravo: "Former."

John Phillips: "Yes."

Mark Bravo: "Make sure you emphasize that. Max loves it."

The spotlight remains empty.

Five seconds pass.

Ten.

The boos grow louder.

John Phillips: "Of course he's making them wait."

Mark Bravo: "The man lost the championship, John. He didn't lose his sense of dramatic timing."

Finally...

Maxwell Jett steps into the light.

Designer robe.

Expensive sunglasses.

And an expression suggesting that every person in Philadelphia should consider this the highlight of their year.

Maxwell stops.

He slowly raises his arms.

The boos intensify.

He closes his eyes.

A satisfied smile spreads across his face.

John Phillips: "There is absolutely no humility whatsoever."

Mark Bravo: "Why start now?"

Maxwell lowers his arms.

Then looks over his right shoulder.

Jacoby Jacobs steps through the curtain.

Expensive streetwear.

Smug grin.

Phone already held up, recording the entrance.

Maxwell looks over his left shoulder.

Darian Darrington emerges from the opposite side.

Darian adjusts his jacket before joining Maxwell beneath the spotlight.

First Class.

In full force.

John Phillips: "And Maxwell Jett did not come alone."

Mark Bravo: "Neither did Kairo."

John Phillips: "That's true. The Creed Method is represented at ringside by Eli Creed and Lindsey Lothario. Maxwell has Jacoby Jacobs and Darian Darrington."

Mark Bravo: "We might need a second referee just to watch everything outside the ring."

Jacoby turns his phone toward Maxwell.

Jacoby Jacobs: "Tell 'em, champ."

Maxwell's smile disappears.

Slowly, he turns his head toward Jacoby.

Jacoby realizes it immediately.

Jacoby Jacobs: "...former champ."

Maxwell stares at him.

Darian looks away, trying not to laugh.

Finally Maxwell turns toward the camera.

Maxwell Jett: "Still the only champion that matters."

The boos grow louder.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross may disagree."

Mark Bravo: "I'm fairly certain Chris Ross owning the actual championship would strengthen his argument."

Maxwell starts down the entranceway.

Jacoby and Darian follow on either side.

The formation is deliberate.

Maxwell in front.

First Class behind him.

Not walking quickly.

Why would they?

Everyone else can wait.

John Phillips: "It has been less than two weeks since Maxwell Jett walked into One Last Stop as UTA Champion."

Mark Bravo: "And approximately fifteen minutes into the show, he wasn't anymore."

John Phillips: "Chris Ross pinned Maxwell to win the championship in that Triple Threat Match involving Mike Best."

Mark Bravo: "And Max has complained about virtually every aspect of it except the part where his shoulders were on the mat for three seconds."

Maxwell passes a fan holding a sign.

ROSS > JETT

Max stops.

He looks at the sign.

Then at the fan.

Then back at the sign.

Maxwell removes his sunglasses.

Hands them to Darian.

Then holds one hand out toward the fan.

The fan hesitates.

Max motions for the sign.

John Phillips: "Don't give it to him."

The fan does.

Maxwell studies it.

He nods thoughtfully.

Then tears it straight down the middle.

The crowd erupts.

Maxwell drops the pieces at the fan's feet.

Maxwell Jett: "Buy another ticket and try again."

John Phillips: "What an absolute jerk."

Mark Bravo: "That's very environmentally irresponsible."

John Phillips: "That's your concern?"

Maxwell resumes his walk.

Jacoby turns his phone toward the angry fan.

Jacoby Jacobs: "You just got content, baby!"

Darian laughs.

John Phillips: "First Class somehow becomes more irritating when they're together."

Mark Bravo: "Synergy."

Inside the ring, Kairo watches.

A slight grin appears.

Maxwell sees it.

He stops halfway down the ramp.

Points toward Kairo.

Then points toward himself.

Maxwell Jett: "You?"

Max laughs.

He looks back at Jacoby.

Then Darian.

All three begin laughing.

Mark Bravo: "Maybe don't do that."

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey is being dismissed before the bell even rings."

Mark Bravo: "That's Maxwell Jett. In Max's mind, this shouldn't even be happening."

John Phillips: "Why?"

Mark Bravo: "Because he's a former UTA Champion. He believes qualifying is for everybody below him."

Maxwell turns toward the hard camera while continuing to walk backward down the aisle.

Maxwell Jett: "Let me understand this."

He points toward himself.

Maxwell Jett: "I carried this company."

Another step backward.

Maxwell Jett: "I made that championship relevant."

Another.

Maxwell Jett: "And now I have to qualify?"

Max laughs incredulously.

Maxwell Jett: "Against him?"

He jerks his thumb toward Kairo.

Kairo's smile widens.

John Phillips: "There is the Maxwell Jett we know."

Mark Bravo: "That's a man born believing the universe made an administrative error by placing other people in it."

Maxwell reaches ringside.

He stops.

The Creed Method stands directly across the ring from him.

Eli Creed.

Lindsey Lothario.

Kairo Bey inside.

Maxwell looks at all three.

Then turns toward Jacoby and Darian.

He motions at the Creed Method.

Maxwell Jett: "Is this a wrestling match or a group therapy session?"

Jacoby nearly doubles over laughing.

Darian points toward Eli.

Darian Darrington: "Man brought his life coach!"

Eli Creed simply smiles.

Lindsey's expression is much less amused.

John Phillips: "Probably not wise to antagonize everybody before you've even entered the ring."

Mark Bravo: "Maxwell doesn't consider that antagonizing. He considers it communicating."

Maxwell walks toward the steps.

Eli is standing several feet away.

Max stops beside him.

Eli turns his head.

The two stare at one another.

Maxwell smiles.

Maxwell Jett: "You charge these people for this shit?"

Eli maintains the same soft smile.

Eli Creed: "You seem upset."

The crowd laughs.

Maxwell's smile disappears.

Mark Bravo: "Oh no."

John Phillips: "Eli found the button."

Maxwell stares at Creed.

Then slowly forces the smile back onto his face.

Maxwell Jett: "Cute."

He climbs the steps.

John Phillips: "Remember what Eli told Kairo moments ago. Maxwell wants him angry. He wants him impatient."

Mark Bravo: "Because Max isn't just wrestling his opponent. He's constantly trying to manipulate them."

Maxwell reaches the apron.

He looks through the ropes toward Kairo.

Kairo motions for him to come inside.

Maxwell raises one finger.

Wait.

He wipes his boots.

Slowly.

One.

Then the other.

Kairo shakes his head.

John Phillips: "He's deliberately making Kairo wait."

Mark Bravo: "The match hasn't started and Max is already working."

Maxwell finally steps between the ropes.

The moment both feet hit the canvas, the leisurely demeanor disappears.

He moves quickly toward the center.

Kairo steps forward to meet him.

The referee immediately moves between them.

John Phillips: "And suddenly Maxwell is all business."

Maxwell points around the referee toward Kairo.

Maxwell Jett: "You know what your problem is?"

Kairo smiles.

Kairo Bey: "Already got one."

He points at Maxwell.

The Philadelphia crowd pops.

Maxwell's jaw tightens.

Mark Bravo: "Okay, Kairo."

Maxwell looks around at the cheering crowd.

Then back at Kairo.

Maxwell Jett: "Enjoy that."

He gestures toward the crowd.

Maxwell Jett: "That's what losers get."

Kairo's smile remains.

Maxwell Jett: "Applause."

Max points toward himself.

Maxwell Jett: "I get championships."

John Phillips: "Not currently."

Mark Bravo: "John!"

The Philadelphia crowd begins chanting.

"FORMER CHAMP!"

"FORMER CHAMP!"

"FORMER CHAMP!"

Maxwell slowly turns toward the crowd.

His face changes.

Just slightly.

John Phillips: "Oh, they got him."

Mark Bravo: "And Max keeps a mental list of things like this."

Jacoby climbs onto the apron.

Jacoby Jacobs: "Y'all better put some respect on his name!"

The boos get louder.

Darian begins yelling at fans from the floor.

Darian Darrington: "He carried this place!"

The referee orders Jacoby down.

Jacoby argues briefly before finally dropping to ringside.

John Phillips: "This has already become chaotic."

Mark Bravo: "And nobody has touched anybody yet."

Maxwell removes his robe.

He holds it out without looking.

Darian reaches through the ropes and takes it.

Max then removes his expensive watch.

Hands that off as well.

He turns back toward Kairo.

Kairo is bouncing lightly on the balls of his feet.

Maxwell looks down at Kairo's feet.

Then back up.

Maxwell Jett: "You done dancing?"

Kairo Bey: "You done talking?"

The crowd pops again.

Maxwell immediately turns toward the referee.

Maxwell Jett: "Ring the fucking bell."

John Phillips: "For someone who spent five minutes delaying things, he suddenly seems impatient."

The referee checks Kairo.

Kairo nods.

The referee checks Maxwell.

Max rolls his eyes.

Maxwell Jett: "I'm good."

Outside the ring, the two groups settle into opposing positions.

Eli Creed and Lindsey Lothario in Kairo's corner.

Jacoby Jacobs and Darian Darrington in Maxwell's.

John Phillips: "Take a look around ringside."

Mark Bravo: "This isn't just Kairo against Max anymore."

John Phillips: "The Creed Method on one side."

Mark Bravo: "First Class on the other."

John Phillips: "And in the middle, two men trying to claim the final Ring King qualification of the night."

Maxwell steps toward Kairo.

They meet near the center.

Max is slightly heavier.

Kairo slightly taller.

Very different approaches.

John Phillips: "Kairo wants speed. Angles. Movement."

Mark Bravo: "Maxwell wants control."

John Phillips: "Kairo wants Maxwell chasing him."

Mark Bravo: "And Maxwell wants Kairo frustrated enough to make one mistake."

Maxwell leans closer.

Maxwell Jett: "You're not on my level."

Kairo doesn't flinch.

Kairo Bey: "Then keep up."

Kairo backs away.

Maxwell stares after him.

John Phillips: "The former UTA Champion against the Neon Ace."

Mark Bravo: "This one's got some heat already."

The referee signals toward the timekeeper.

Outside, Eli Creed watches Maxwell.

Jacoby and Darian watch Kairo.

Lindsey folds their arms.

And Maxwell Jett looks across the ring like he cannot believe anyone has seriously suggested Kairo Bey might beat him.

DING! DING! DING!

John Phillips: "And the main event is underway!"

Kairo Bey immediately begins moving.

Light on his feet.

Circling.

Changing directions before Maxwell Jett can settle.

Maxwell stays near the center.

Watching.

Smirking.

Mark Bravo: "And right away, Kairo is trying to make Max turn."

John Phillips: "That's Kairo's game. Speed, angles, timing."

Mark Bravo: "Maxwell's going to want none of that."

Kairo suddenly darts forward.

Max reaches for a collar-and-elbow.

Kairo slips underneath.
Spins behind him.
Maxwell immediately turns—
Kairo is already gone.
Back toward the ropes.
Grinning.
John Phillips: "Too quick."
Maxwell stares at Kairo.
Then toward Eli Creed.
Then back at Kairo.
Maxwell Jett: "Cute."
Kairo motions toward him.
Kairo Bey: "Keep up."
The crowd reacts.
Mark Bravo: "Kairo is poking the bear."
John Phillips: "Maxwell has been poking everyone else since he walked into the building."
Maxwell steps forward again.
Kairo circles.
Max lunges.
Kairo catches the wrist!
ARM DRAG!
Maxwell rolls through and springs back up.
Kairo is waiting.
SECOND ARM DRAG!
Maxwell hits the canvas again!
John Phillips: "Kairo Bey taking control early!"
Maxwell gets up faster this time.
Kairo hits the ropes.
TILT-A-WHIRL HEADSCISSORS!
Maxwell goes tumbling across the ring!
Philadelphia pops.
Mark Bravo: "This is exactly what Max didn't want."
Maxwell slides under the bottom rope to the floor.

The crowd immediately boos.

John Phillips: "And there it is."

Mark Bravo: "Reset."

John Phillips: "Retreat."

Mark Bravo: "Reset."

Maxwell walks directly toward Jacoby and Darian.

He puts both hands on his hips.

Looks up at Kairo.

Then shakes his head.

Maxwell Jett: "He's doing gymnastics."

Jacoby nods immediately.

Jacoby Jacobs: "That's not wrestling."

Darian points toward Kairo.

Darian Darrington: "Make him wrestle."

John Phillips: "Maxwell got thrown around, so naturally the problem is Kairo's wrestling style."

Mark Bravo: "Accountability is not really First Class's strongest subject."

The referee begins counting.

ONE!

Maxwell ignores him.

TWO!

Kairo walks toward the ropes.

He motions toward Max.

Kairo Bey: "Come on."

THREE!

Maxwell looks around at the crowd.

Then toward Kairo.

Maxwell Jett: "You'll wait."

Kairo smiles.

He turns away from the ropes.

Walks toward the center.

Maxwell immediately slides back into the ring behind him!

John Phillips: "Watch out!"

Max charges—

Kairo pivots!

SPINNING BACK KICK!

Maxwell gets caught in the ribs!

Mark Bravo: "Kairo knew!"

Max folds slightly.

Kairo grabs his wrist.

Irish whip!

Maxwell reverses!

Kairo hits the ropes.

Max ducks for a back body drop—

Kairo leapfrogs!

Max turns.

Kairo rebounds.

SPRINGBOARD CROSSBODY!

It connects!

Kairo hooks the leg!

ONE!

Maxwell kicks out quickly!

John Phillips: "Only one, but Kairo's controlling the pace."

Kairo pops back up.

Maxwell sits up.

Kairo hits the ropes again—

BASEMENT DROPKICK!

Max gets blasted in the chest!

He rolls toward the ropes.

Mark Bravo: "Kairo is making Max react instead of think."

Outside the ring, Eli Creed gives a small nod.

Eli Creed: "Your pace."

Kairo hears him.

He stays on Maxwell.

Max pulls himself up with the ropes.

Kairo charges—

MAXWELL DROPS DOWN!

Kairo's momentum carries him over the top rope!

But Kairo catches himself on the apron!

John Phillips: "Kairo hangs on!"

Maxwell turns.

Kairo swings a kick through the ropes!

Max catches the leg!

Kairo jumps—

ENZUIGIRI!

Maxwell stumbles backward!

Mark Bravo: "Max cannot catch this guy clean!"

Kairo grabs the top rope.

He springboards—

Maxwell lunges forward!

AND SHOVES THE TOP ROPE!

Kairo loses his balance!

He crashes hard across the top rope and tumbles to the floor!

John Phillips: "Oh, come on!"

Mark Bravo: "There it is."

Kairo lands badly near ringside.

Lindsey immediately moves toward him.

Eli puts one hand out.

Stopping them.

Eli Creed: "Let him breathe."

Lindsey looks toward Eli.

Then reluctantly stays back.

John Phillips: "And Maxwell finally found a way to interrupt Kairo's momentum."

Mark Bravo: "He didn't beat the speed. He attacked the environment."

Maxwell stands inside the ring.

He looks down at Kairo.

Then toward the hard camera.

He points to his temple.

Maxwell Jett: "Wrestling."

The crowd boos.

John Phillips: "No, that's called being a jerk."

The referee begins counting Kairo.

ONE!

Kairo rolls onto his side.

TWO!

Maxwell walks toward the ropes.

He steps halfway through them.

The referee orders him back.

Max raises his hands.

Maxwell Jett: "I'm helping."

The referee argues with him.

Outside the ring, Jacoby sees the distraction.

John Phillips: "Watch Jacoby."

Jacoby begins walking toward Kairo.

Lindsey immediately steps into his path.

Jacoby stops.

He looks Lindsey up and down.

Jacoby Jacobs: "We got a problem?"

Lindsey steps closer.

Lindsey Lothario: "Try it."

Jacoby raises both hands.

Mark Bravo: "And Lindsey just took away one of First Class's shortcuts."

Darian begins moving around the opposite side.

Eli Creed turns his head toward him.

Darian stops.

Eli smiles pleasantly.

Eli Creed: "Don't."

Darian looks at him.

Then toward Jacoby.

Neither member of First Class moves.

John Phillips: "This is why having Eli and Lindsey out here matters."

Mark Bravo: "Maxwell's usual numerical advantage is neutralized."

Kairo gets back to his feet.

FOUR!

He grabs the apron.

FIVE!

Kairo rolls underneath the bottom rope.

Maxwell immediately attacks!

STOMP TO THE BACK!

Another!

Another!

John Phillips: "And Max pounces the moment Kairo gets back inside!"

Kairo tries to rise.

Maxwell grabs the left arm.

ARM WRINGER!

Kairo drops to one knee.

Mark Bravo: "Here comes the game plan."

Max twists the arm again.

Then drives an elbow into the shoulder!

Kairo winces.

John Phillips: "Maxwell immediately targeting the arm."

Mark Bravo: "And think about Kairo's offense. Springboards. Rope walks. Cutters. He needs those arms to launch himself and control his landings."

Max pulls Kairo upright by the wrist.

ARM WRINGER—

SNAP SUPLEX!

Kairo hits the canvas!

Max floats over into a cover.

ONE!

TWO!

KAIRO KICKS OUT!

John Phillips: "Two."

Maxwell immediately grabs the arm again.

He doesn't give Kairo space.

Hammerlock.

Kairo tries to stand.

Max drives a knee into the back of the shoulder!

John Phillips: "Right back to that arm."

Maxwell looks toward Eli Creed.

Then toward Lindsey.

He smiles.

Maxwell Jett: "This your guy?"

He wrenches the arm harder.

Maxwell Jett: "This is what you fixed?"

Eli does not react.

Lindsey does.

They take one step toward the ring.

Eli raises one hand.

Lindsey stops.

Mark Bravo: "Maxwell is trying to get Lindsey involved."

John Phillips: "He wants the distraction."

Maxwell releases the hammerlock.

Then kicks Kairo directly between the shoulder blades!

Kairo drops forward.

Maxwell Jett: "Stay enlightened."

The boos rain down.

John Phillips: "He's insufferable."

Maxwell grabs Kairo around the head.

Standing side headlock.

He squeezes.

Kairo reaches around Max's waist.

Tries to push him toward the ropes.

Max plants his feet.

Mark Bravo: "And look at the difference already. First few minutes were all Kairo's pace. Now Maxwell has stopped everything."

Kairo drives an elbow into Max's ribs.

Another.

Max tightens the headlock.

Kairo fires a third!

The grip loosens.

Kairo shoves Maxwell toward the ropes!

Max rebounds.

Kairo drops down.

Max hurdles him.

Kairo springs back up.

Max rebounds again—

Kairo leapfrogs!

Max hits the ropes again.

Kairo turns—

RUNNING BOOT TO THE FACE!

MAXWELL STOPS HIM COLD!

John Phillips: "And Max cuts him off!"

Kairo drops flat.

Maxwell stands over him.

Then slowly turns toward the crowd.

He points down at Kairo.

Maxwell Jett: "YOUR GUY!"

The crowd boos loudly.

Max turns toward the hard camera.

Maxwell Jett: "This is who you thought was gonna beat me?"

He laughs.

John Phillips: "And here's the villain lecture."

Mark Bravo: "He cannot help himself."

Maxwell continues talking toward the camera.

Maxwell Jett: "I was UTA Champion while this kid was doing TikTok flips—"

KAIRO KIPS UP!

Maxwell turns—

SPINNING BACK KICK!

Max gets caught in the ribs!

John Phillips: "THERE IT IS!"

Mark Bravo: "Talk less!"

Kairo fires a rapid kick to the thigh!

Another to the ribs!

High kick!

Maxwell blocks it!

Kairo spins through—

BACKFIST!

Max staggers!

John Phillips: "Kairo exploding back into this!"

Kairo hits the ropes.

Maxwell swings a clothesline!

Kairo ducks!

SPRINGBOARD!

CROSSBODY!

MAX GOES DOWN!

Kairo covers!

ONE!

TWO!

MAXWELL KICKS OUT!

John Phillips: "Two!"

Kairo pops up again.

Maxwell rolls toward the ropes.

Kairo charges.

BASEMENT DROPKICK!

Max gets knocked underneath the bottom rope to the floor!

Mark Bravo: "Maxwell is outside again!"

Kairo sees him.

He takes two quick steps backward.

Eli looks up.

Lindsey recognizes it immediately.

John Phillips: "Kairo's lining something up!"

Maxwell gets to his feet on the floor.

Jacoby and Darian move toward him.

Kairo hits the ropes!

He launches over the top!

TOPE CON HILO!

KAIRO CRASHES INTO MAXWELL, JACOBY AND DARIAN!

John Phillips: "KAIRO BEY WIPES OUT FIRST CLASS!"

The Philadelphia crowd erupts!

All four men crash to the floor!

Kairo rolls through the landing and comes up on one knee.

He looks toward the crowd.

The grin returns.

Kairo Bey: "SWITCH IT ON!"

Philadelphia gets even louder.

Mark Bravo: "There's your neon moment!"

Lindsey actually smirks.

Eli Creed gives one slow nod.

John Phillips: "And for the first time tonight, First Class has been completely neutralized!"

Kairo grabs Maxwell.

He rolls the former champion back into the ring.

Kairo climbs onto the apron.

Maxwell gets onto one knee.

Kairo grabs the top rope.

John Phillips: "Kairo is looking for another springboard!"

He launches—

MAXWELL MOVES!

Kairo lands on his feet!

He turns—

MAXWELL KICKS THE DAMAGED ARM!

Kairo cries out!

Mark Bravo: "There's that arm again!"

Max immediately grabs it.

HAMMERLOCK DDT!

KAIRO IS SPIKED INTO THE CANVAS!

John Phillips: "HAMMERLOCK DDT!"

Maxwell rolls Kairo over.

Hooks the leg!

ONE!

TWO!

KAIRO KICKS OUT!

Maxwell immediately sits up.

He stares at the referee.

Maxwell Jett: "That was three."

The referee says two.

Maxwell holds up three fingers.

Maxwell Jett: "One. Two. Three."

The referee holds up two again.

Maxwell Jett: "That's why you're a referee."

John Phillips: "What does that even mean?"

Mark Bravo: "I don't think Max knows. He just wanted the last word."

Maxwell turns back toward Kairo.

Kairo is clutching his left shoulder and arm.

Max sees it.

The frustration disappears.

The smile returns.

John Phillips: "And that's the scary part about Maxwell Jett."

Mark Bravo: "He found something."

Maxwell kneels beside Kairo.

He grabs the damaged arm.

Kairo immediately tries pulling it away.

Max holds on.

He looks toward Eli Creed.

Maxwell Jett: "Watch."

Max twists the arm behind Kairo's back.

Then stomps down onto the shoulder!

Kairo cries out!

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett has selected his target."

Mark Bravo: "And now the real test for Kairo starts."

Maxwell grabs the arm again.

Kairo reaches toward the ropes with his free hand.

Max pulls him back toward the middle.

Then begins positioning himself for the Long Island Lock.

John Phillips: "Maxwell looking for the submission!"

Kairo immediately rolls through!

He twists his hips.

Gets one knee underneath himself.

Then kicks Maxwell away!

Mark Bravo: "Kairo gets free!"

Maxwell rolls backward.

Kairo gets up.

One arm hanging lower than the other.

But he's moving.

John Phillips: "That left arm is clearly compromised."

Maxwell charges.

Kairo sidesteps!

Max hits the ropes.

Kairo turns—

MIRAGE KICK!

The running bicycle knee catches Maxwell under the jaw!

John Phillips: "MIRAGE KICK!"

Maxwell drops to one knee!

Kairo sees it.

The crowd rises.

Mark Bravo: "Here's the opening!"

Kairo runs toward the ropes.

He leaps onto the middle strand—

But the damaged arm gives slightly when he reaches for balance!

Kairo hesitates for half a heartbeat.

John Phillips: "The shoulder!"

That half-beat is enough.

Maxwell surges to his feet.

Kairo lands behind him.

Maxwell spins.

Kairo swings—

MAXWELL DUCKS!

He catches the damaged arm!

Mark Bravo: "Snakebite!"

Maxwell yanks Kairo forward.

Arm trapped.

Head controlled.

And before Kairo can even understand the position—

PLATINUM DRIVER!

KAIRO IS SPIKED INTO THE CANVAS!

John Phillips: "PLATINUM DRIVER!"

The crowd gasps.

Kairo collapses flat.

Maxwell sits beside him.

He looks down at Kairo.

Then toward Eli Creed.

Then toward Lindsey.

Slowly...

Maxwell smiles.

Mark Bravo: "Oh, he knows."

Maxwell doesn't immediately cover.

Instead, he looks toward the hard camera.

Maxwell Jett: "That's your future?"

He points toward Kairo.

Maxwell Jett: "Seriously?"

John Phillips: "Cover him!"

Maxwell finally places one hand across Kairo's chest.

No leg hook.

No urgency.

Just contempt.

ONE!

Maxwell looks toward Lindsey.

TWO!

Then toward Eli.

THREE!

DING! DING! DING!

John Phillips: "Just like that, Maxwell Jett is going to Ring King."

Mark Bravo: "Kairo had him moving. Kairo had him frustrated. But Maxwell found the arm, waited for the mistake, and the Platinum Driver ended it immediately."

Maxwell removes his hand from Kairo's chest.

He doesn't stand right away.

Instead, he sits beside the fallen Neon Ace.

Cross-legged.

Relaxed.

Like he's waiting for a meeting to start.

John Phillips: "This is unnecessary."

Maxwell looks down at Kairo.

Maxwell Jett: "You did great."

He nods sincerely.

Maxwell Jett: "Really."

Then he leans closer.

Maxwell Jett: "For you."

Philadelphia explodes in boos.

Mark Bravo: "There's Max."

The ring announcer steps forward.

Ring Announcer: "Here is your winner... and advancing to the 2026 Ring King tournament... MAXWELL... JETT!"

Jacoby Jacobs and Darian Darrington immediately slide into the ring.

Jacoby raises both arms.

Jacoby Jacobs: "THAT'S MY CHAMP!"

Maxwell turns sharply.

Jacoby catches himself.

Jacoby Jacobs: "Former champ!"

Maxwell stares at him.

Darian starts laughing.

Darian Darrington: "Man, you gotta stop doing that."

Maxwell finally stands.

He looks toward Kairo again.

Eli Creed has entered the ring now.

Lindsey steps in as well.

They move toward Kairo.

First Class moves toward Maxwell.

For a moment, the two groups stand only several feet apart.

John Phillips: "Careful here."

Lindsey glares toward Maxwell.

Maxwell notices.

He smiles.

Maxwell Jett: "Hey."

Lindsey says nothing.

Maxwell Jett: "At least one of you made it."

Lindsey steps forward.

Eli calmly puts an arm across their chest.

Eli Creed: "Not tonight."

Maxwell laughs.

Maxwell Jett: "Good advice."

Jacoby and Darian flank Maxwell.

Max backs toward the ropes.

John Phillips: "Maxwell got exactly what he wanted."

Mark Bravo: "And now he's making sure everybody knows it."

The massive video wall changes.

RING KING 2026

QUALIFIED

MAXWELL JETT

Maxwell turns.

He looks at his own name.

Then slowly raises both arms.

The boos intensify.

John Phillips: "Five qualifiers tonight."

Mark Bravo: "And the former champion is among them."

Maxwell immediately turns toward commentary.

Maxwell Jett: "DON'T CALL ME THAT!"

Phillips can't help but smile.

John Phillips: "Former UTA Champion Maxwell Jett."

The crowd starts chanting again.

"FORMER CHAMP!"

"FORMER CHAMP!"

"FORMER CHAMP!"

Maxwell's face tightens.

Jacoby steps in front of him.

Jacoby Jacobs: "Nah, nah, don't listen to 'em."

Darian points toward the screen.

Darian Darrington: "You're in Ring King. That's all that matters."

Maxwell looks toward the graphic.

His anger slowly fades.

The smirk returns.

Maxwell Jett: "Exactly."

He points toward his name.

Maxwell Jett: "Because apparently..."

Maxwell looks around the arena.

Maxwell Jett: "...I have to win a tournament to get back something that never should've left me."

John Phillips: "There it is."

Maxwell points into the camera.

Maxwell Jett: "Chris Ross."

The crowd reacts.

Maxwell Jett: "Enjoy playing champion."

Maxwell's expression turns cold.

Maxwell Jett: "I'll come get my property when I'm done embarrassing fifteen other people."

Mark Bravo: "Fifteen?"

John Phillips: "That's Maxwell's math. Everyone else in the tournament exists solely to lose to him."

Maxwell steps onto the second rope.

Jacoby and Darian stand beneath him.

First Class poses together.

Across the ring, Eli kneels beside Kairo.

Kairo is beginning to sit up.

Lindsey remains beside him.

John Phillips: "Disappointing result for Kairo Bey, but he showed flashes tonight of exactly why so many people believe his future is bright."

Mark Bravo: "Unfortunately, Maxwell Jett doesn't care about anybody's future but his own."

Maxwell drops down from the ropes.

He turns toward the Creed Method one final time.

Kairo is now sitting up.

Maxwell points toward him.

Maxwell Jett: "Thanks for qualifying me."

Kairo glares back.

Maxwell laughs.

Then steps through the ropes.

Jacoby and Darian follow.

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett entered this match believing it was beneath him."

Mark Bravo: "And because he won relatively quickly, we're never going to hear the end of it."

First Class starts walking up the entranceway.

Maxwell walks backward for several steps.

He looks toward the ring.

Then spreads his arms.

Maxwell Jett: "THAT'S IT?"

The boos pour down.

Maxwell Jett: "THAT WAS THE MAIN EVENT?"

Jacoby throws his head back laughing.

Darian applauds.

John Phillips: "He won. Can he just leave?"

Mark Bravo: "You know the answer."

Maxwell turns toward the stage.

The screen still reads:

MAXWELL JETT — QUALIFIED

He points at it.

Then turns toward the hard camera one final time.

Maxwell Jett: "You're welcome."

First Class disappears through the curtain.

The camera returns to the ring.

Kairo is standing now with Eli and Lindsey beside him.

Disappointed.

Frustrated.

But upright.

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett advances."

Mark Bravo: "Kairo Bey does not."

The camera lingers on the ring.

Kairo Bey stands between Eli Creed and Lindsey Lothario, still staring toward the entranceway where First Class disappeared moments ago.

The massive Ring King logo slowly replaces Maxwell Jett's qualifying graphic on the video wall.

John Phillips: "Five qualifying matches tonight. Five more names added to the field."

Mark Bravo: "Kirsty McKinney. Bianca Page. Lindsey Lothario. Mike Best. Maxwell Jett."

John Phillips: "And this is only the beginning of the Road to the Throne."

The camera cuts to a wide shot of the Xfinity Mobile Arena.

The crowd remains on its feet as the Ring King logo glows above the ring.

John Phillips: "The field continues to take shape, and before this journey is over, sixteen competitors will have their opportunity to become the 2026 Ring King... or Queen."

Mark Bravo: "And based on what we saw tonight, nobody's getting there the easy way."

Kairo finally turns away from the entranceway.

Eli places a hand on his shoulder.

Lindsey walks alongside them as the Creed Method begins leaving the ring.

John Phillips: "For Mark Bravo, I'm John Phillips. Thank you for joining us in Philadelphia for Road to the Throne."

Mark Bravo: "Good night, everybody."

The camera pulls farther back.

The Ring King logo fills the screen.

ROAD TO THE THRONE

TO BE CONTINUED...

Fade to black.

Conclusion

All Six Singles Champions Are Guaranteed a Spot in the Tournament.

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