

Road to the Throne: 08.28.2026

Promotion: United Toughness Alliance
Date: August 28, 2026
Location: Rocket Arena — Cleveland, Ohio

Preview

Round 1 of the Ring King tournament continues in Cleveland.

Results

Introduction

Segment

The UTA logo flashes across the screen.

Black.

A low rumble begins underneath the silence.

Then—

Highlights from last week.

Sol Azteca standing across the ring from Selina Santorino.

A rapid sequence of exchanges.

Sol getting the victory.

Mark Bravo: "Sol Azteca is moving on!"

Cut.

Lindsey Lothario pushing Bianca Page to the limit.

Ace Andrews creating the opening.

Bianca capitalizing.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page survives! It wasn't pretty, but she's through!"

Cut.

Madman Szalinski throwing everything he has at Samuel Scythe.

The veteran refusing to stay down.

Scythe finally putting him away.

Mark Bravo: "Samuel Scythe advances, but Madman Szalinski gave him absolutely everything he had!"

Madman sits alone in the center of the ring.

The Toronto crowd rises around him.

Cut.

Chris Ross and Mikey Unlikely.

The UTA Champion stalking the WrestleZone Champion.

Mikey slipping outside.

Ross following.

Then—

CRACK!

A hooded attacker drives a steel chair into Chris Ross.

Again.

Again.

The referee counts.

Ross desperately reaches for the apron.

John Phillips: "GET UP, CHRIS!"

TEN.

Mikey Unlikely celebrates.

The hood comes down.

The face covering comes away.

The mask underneath is revealed.

Mark Bravo: "MADMAN SZALINSKI?!"

Madman raises the dented chair above his head.

Chris Ross collapses outside.

Freeze frame.

Black.

Four names appear one after another.

SOL AZTECA.

BIANCA PAGE.

SAMUEL SCYTHER.

MIKEY UNLIKELY.

Then:

FOUR HAVE ADVANCED.

A beat.

FOUR MORE WILL JOIN THEM TONIGHT.

The opening music hits.

A sweeping aerial shot of downtown Cleveland fills the screen before the broadcast races toward Rocket Arena.

Inside, thousands of fans are already on their feet.

Signs fill the crowd.

UTA merchandise everywhere.

The camera sweeps across the packed arena before settling on the entrance stage.

Pyrotechnics erupt across the set.

BOOM!

BOOM!

BOOM!

The massive video screen displays:

ROAD TO THE THRONE

CLEVELAND, OHIO

AUGUST 28, 2026

The camera cuts to ringside.

Mark Bravo: "CLEVELAND, OHIO! Welcome to Road to the Throne! I'm Mark Bravo alongside John Phillips, and one week ago in Toronto, the opening round of the 2026 Ring King tournament began with a night none of us will soon forget."

John Phillips: "Four matches. Four people moving on. And one ending that I think we're all still trying to wrap our heads around."

Mark Bravo: "Madman Szalinski brutally attacked UTA Champion Chris Ross and directly cost him his place in this tournament. We still have questions about why Madman did what he did, but one thing we know for certain: Chris Ross is out of Ring King."

John Phillips: "And Mikey Unlikely is in Round Two. He may not have known Madman was coming, but once Mikey realized somebody was taking Chris Ross apart on the floor, he was more than happy to make sure the referee was looking anywhere else."

Mark Bravo: "Mikey joins Sol Azteca, Bianca Page and Fighting Champion Samuel Scythe as the first four competitors to survive Round One."

A tournament graphic fills the screen.

ADVANCED TO ROUND TWO

Sol Azteca

Bianca Page

Samuel Scythe

Mikey Unlikely

John Phillips: "That's half the field, Mark."

Mark Bravo: "And tonight, we find out who fills the other half."

The graphic changes.

RING KING — ROUND ONE

HAKURYU vs. KIRSTY McKINNEY

Mark Bravo: "United States Champion Hakuryu meets Kirsty McKinney. Kirsty fought her way into this tournament through qualifying. Tonight she gets one of the toughest possible tests waiting for her."

The next match appears.

EMILY HIGHTOWER vs. MAXWELL JETT

John Phillips: "And how about this one? Former UTA Champion Maxwell Jett against the woman currently carrying both the Women's and Hardcore Championships, Emily Hightower."

Mark Bravo: "Two champions in their own right. Two very different competitors. Only one of them gets Round Two."

The graphic changes again.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO vs. MAXX MAYHEM

John Phillips: "The First Lady of The Empire, Marie Van Claudio, goes one-on-one with Maxx Mayhem. Marie earned her place in this tournament, but tonight qualifying means nothing. Win or you're done."

One final graphic.

The crowd gets louder as the names appear.

MIKE BEST vs. BOBBY DEAN

Mark Bravo: "And then there is our main event."

John Phillips: "This is one I've been waiting for."

Mark Bravo: "For the first time ever inside a UTA ring—and for the first time in years anywhere—Mike Best and International Champion Bobby Dean will stand across the ring from one another."

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean already knows what's waiting for him September 26th. Eric Dane Junior is cashing in that guaranteed championship opportunity at Ring King. But Bobby can't worry about September yet. Because tonight, Mike Best is standing directly in front of him."

Mark Bravo: "Mike Best came through qualifying to get here. Bobby Dean entered automatically as International Champion. Tonight, one of them takes another step toward becoming the 2026 Ring King."

The camera pulls back from the commentary position and takes in the entire arena.

John Phillips: "Four matches."

Mark Bravo: "Four spots in Round Two."

John Phillips: "And no second chances."

Mark Bravo: "By the time we leave Cleveland tonight, the opening round will be complete."

The Road to the Throne graphic explodes across the screen.

Mark Bravo: "The road to Los Angeles continues RIGHT NOW!"

Explanation

Segment

The broadcast returns to ringside.

The atmosphere inside Rocket Arena is still electric when—

Everything goes black.

The crowd reacts immediately.

A few screams.

Then anticipation.

John Phillips doesn't even need to wait.

John Phillips: "Oh boy."

Silence.

Then—

DOOOOOOONG.

The Liberty Bell.

The reaction grows.

Mark Bravo: "We wondered when we'd hear from him."

Another toll.

DOOOOOOONG.

Images begin appearing across the massive screen.

Wet pavement beneath flickering streetlights.

An empty Harrisburg alley.

Police lights reflecting against brick.

Then the image suddenly changes.

Toronto.

One week ago.

Chris Ross lying outside the ring.

A hooded figure standing over him.

A steel chair rising.

CRACK!

The footage cuts before impact.

Another shot.

The hood coming down.

The mask underneath.

Madman Szalinski.

Black.

Then two words fill the screen.

THE REAPER.

"Black Flame" by Bury Tomorrow tears through Rocket Arena.

Red.

White.

Blue.

Police lights flash across the entranceway.

The crowd erupts.

And through the darkness emerges—

Chris Ross.

The UTA Championship rests across his shoulder.

The long black jacket.

Messy hair.

Unkempt facial hair.

And hanging from his right hand...

A folded steel chair.

Ross doesn't raise the championship.

Doesn't throw his arms out.

Doesn't play to Cleveland.

He simply stands there.

Looking toward the ring.

John Phillips: "One week ago, Chris Ross entered the main event of Road to the Throne with a chance to become Ring King. He left Toronto unconscious."

Mark Bravo: "And not because of Mikey Unlikely."

The replay briefly appears again on the screen behind Ross.

Madman.

The chair.

Ross down.

Mark Bravo: "Madman Szalinski made that decision for him."

Ross begins walking.

The chair drags behind him.

SCREEEEEECH.

Steel against the ramp.

Ross' eyes never leave the ring.

John Phillips: "What makes this even more difficult to understand is what happened earlier that same night. Madman had just been eliminated by Samuel Scythe. Chris Ross spoke to him backstage."

Mark Bravo: "And Ross didn't give him what he wanted."

John Phillips: "Madman floated the idea of one more championship opportunity. Ross said no. Told him he wasn't

giving out pity shots."

Mark Bravo: "Then came the word."

A beat.

Mark Bravo: "Retirement."

Ross reaches ringside.

John Phillips: "A few hours later, Madman Szalinski put that chair across Chris Ross' head and cost him Ring King."

Ross suddenly grabs the chair by both sides.

He hurls it over the top rope.

CLANG!

It crashes against the canvas.

Ross walks around ringside and takes a microphone.

Then slides beneath the bottom rope.

He retrieves the chair.

Unfolds it.

Places it directly in the middle of the ring.

Ross sits.

Backwards.

His arms rest across the top of the chair.

The UTA Championship remains over his shoulder.

"Black Flame" fades.

The lights return.

And Cleveland begins chanting.

"ROSS!"

"ROSS!"

"ROSS!"

Chris looks around.

For perhaps the first time tonight, his expression changes.

A small nod.

Almost amused.

He raises the microphone.

Chris Ross: "Forgive me."

He looks around at the cheering crowd.

Chris Ross: "I'm still not used to everybody actually cheering me."

A bigger reaction.

A slight grin appears.

Chris Ross: "But I sure as hell ain't complaining."

Ross lowers the microphone and listens.

Lets the reaction come to him.

Then the grin disappears.

Chris Ross: "Enough pleasantries."

His eyes harden.

Chris Ross: "Because I've got some shit to address."

A beat.

Chris Ross: "Mikey Unlikely."

The crowd boos.

Ross slowly shakes his head.

Chris Ross: "Nothing like taking an L against the guy who essentially got me blacklisted from DEFIANCE and tried to destroy my career."

He runs his thumb slowly across the faceplate of the UTA Championship.

Chris Ross: "Mikey... I hope you send Madman Szalinski one hell of a thank-you card."

Chris Ross: "Because that's about as gift-wrapped of a win as you're ever gonna get."

Ross leans slightly closer to the microphone.

Chris Ross: "A countout."

He scoffs.

Chris Ross: "Give me a break."

Another pause.

Chris Ross: "And don't get comfortable."

Ross' eyes move toward the hard camera.

Chris Ross: "You and me are far from finished."

Chris Ross: "You still owe me a lot of money from DEFIANCE."

A slight grin.

Chris Ross: "I intend on collecting."

The crowd reacts.

John Phillips: "That's a problem for another day, apparently."

Mark Bravo: "Mikey advanced. But Chris Ross clearly isn't treating that countout as the end of anything."

Ross remains seated.

Chris Ross: "But here's the funny part."

He looks down briefly.

Thinking.

Chris Ross: "I'm not as pissed off as I probably should be."

That draws an uncertain reaction.

Chris Ross: "Because I know how this place works."

Chris Ross: "I'm the World Champion."

He pats the championship.

Chris Ross: "That puts a target right here."

Chris Ross: "So somebody jumping me?"

Ross shrugs.

Chris Ross: "I expected that."

Chris Ross: "Hell, I figured Maxwell Jett might come crawling back."

Boos.

Chris Ross: "Maybe Mike Best decides his narcissistic ass needs my attention again."

Another reaction.

Then Ross stops.

His expression changes.

Chris Ross: "But Madman Szalinski?"

The arena fills with boos.

Ross lets them come.

Doesn't interrupt them.

Chris Ross: "Yeah."

A beat.

Chris Ross: "Didn't see that one coming."

Ross finally stands.

He takes the UTA Championship from his shoulder.

Looks at it.

Then raises it over his head.

Chris Ross: "But here's the part everybody seems to be forgetting."

He holds it higher.

Chris Ross: "I'm still World Champion."

The crowd erupts.

Chris Ross: "So screw the damn tournament."

Ross lowers the championship and places it back across his shoulder.

Chris Ross: "The old me?"

He looks toward the entrance.

Chris Ross: "The Keystone State Killa would've already gone hunting."

Chris Ross: "I'd have found Madman backstage."

Ross glances toward the chair.

Chris Ross: "And I'd have kept swinging until somebody dragged me off him."

Ross looks back toward the entrance.

Chris Ross: "But I'm not doing that."

A beat.

Chris Ross: "Because I wanna hear this."

Ross steps toward the ropes.

Chris Ross: "Madman."

Nothing.

Chris Ross: "I request your presence."

The crowd buzzes.

Chris Ross: "Maybe you don't owe me an explanation."

He gestures around Rocket Arena.

Chris Ross: "But after last week?"

Chris Ross: "You damn sure owe them one."

Ross drops the microphone momentarily.

He exits the ring.

Walks directly toward ringside.

Grabs another chair.

John Phillips: "Oh, come on."

Mark Bravo: "He's setting another chair up."

Ross slides back inside.

He unfolds the second chair.

Places it across from his own.

Two chairs.

Center ring.

Ross picks the microphone back up.

Chris Ross: "Come on out."

He points at the empty chair.

Chris Ross: "Stage is yours."

A crooked smile.

Chris Ross: "I even got a damn chair for your Happy Meal-eating ass."

The crowd laughs.

Ross waits.

Nothing.

Then—

Madman Szalinski: "No."

The crowd erupts into boos.

Ross' smile disappears.

Madman Szalinski: "No, I don't."

The camera snaps toward the entrance.

Madman Szalinski steps through the curtain.

He doesn't come charging toward the ring.

Doesn't have the manic energy people associate with him.

He simply stops on the stage.

Microphone in hand.

Ross looks at the empty chair across from him.

Then back at Madman.

John Phillips: "Madman isn't coming any closer."

Mark Bravo: "Would you?"

Madman looks around at the Cleveland crowd.

The boos grow louder.

Madman Szalinski: "Chris, I do not owe anybody a damn thing."

The reaction gets worse.

Madman Szalinski: "I've sacrificed enough for this business."

Madman Szalinski: "I've been tethered to this company for twelve years now."

Madman points toward the ring.

Madman Szalinski: "If anything, the UTA owes me."

Ross remains completely still.

Listening.

Madman Szalinski: "I sacrificed everything for the UTA!"

Madman Szalinski: "I allowed myself to be put into unwinnable scenarios on a nightly basis just because you people would pay whatever we charged you to watch it!"

Madman turns his attention toward the crowd.

Madman Szalinski: "And if any of you had more than three brain cells huddling around a campfire wondering if they were gonna survive the winter, you would've seen it for what it was!"

Thunderous boos.

Madman Szalinski: "You would've changed the channel and watched people in HOW feed each other used tampons, because that's the kind of programming suited for your level of brain capacity!"

Cleveland lets him have it.

Madman smiles.

Not the old goofy Madman smile.

Something uglier.

Ross finally stands from his chair.

Madman's attention returns to him.

Madman Szalinski: "See, Chris... you still think this is about you."

He shakes his head.

Madman Szalinski: "It's not."

Madman Szalinski: "It's about me now."

Madman Szalinski: "It's about me realizing after far too long that I've wasted my entire career worried about what other people thought about me."

Madman slowly begins pacing across the stage.

Madman Szalinski: "It's about me coming to terms with the fact that men like Sean Jackson and Mike Best were right all along."

That gets another reaction.

Madman Szalinski: "It's NOT better to lose clean than win dirty."

Madman stops.

Madman Szalinski: "It's better to just win."

A beat.

Madman Szalinski: "Win, no matter the cost."

Ross slowly raises his microphone.

Chris Ross: "So that's it?"

Madman stares back.

Chris Ross: "Samuel Scythe beats you..."

Chris Ross: "...I tell you something you didn't wanna hear..."

Ross points toward Madman.

Chris Ross: "...and twelve years of everything you claimed to believe disappears in one night?"

Madman's expression tightens.

Chris Ross: "That's your revelation?"

Ross shakes his head.

Chris Ross: "Sounds more like an excuse."

Madman immediately raises his microphone.

Madman Szalinski: "Is that not good enough of an explanation for you?"

Ross lowers his microphone.

Madman Szalinski: "I spent decades fighting what I thought was wrong with this business, Chris."

Madman Szalinski: "No more."

Madman points toward the UTA logo displayed above the ring.

Madman Szalinski: "The UTA can find a new superhero."

A beat.

Madman Szalinski: "This one's not for sale anymore."

The boos rain down.

Madman Szalinski: "And you?"

He points directly at Ross.

Madman Szalinski: "You were just in the wrong place at the wrong time when I finally realized it."

Ross' jaw tightens.

Madman Szalinski: "From now on, I use my powers for MY personal gain."

Madman Szalinski: "You can get behind me..."

Madman's eyes narrow.

Madman Szalinski: "...or you can get crushed beneath me."

Ross gives a slow nod.

Madman Szalinski: "And before you decide which one you wanna do, remember the track record I have in fights I had no business being in."

Madman steps closer to the edge of the stage.

Madman Szalinski: "Back then, I had my hands tied trying to be a people's champion."

Madman Szalinski: "So ask yourself something, Chris."

A long pause.

Madman Szalinski: "How formidable do you think I'm gonna be when I DON'T give a damn about anyone else?"

Silence.

Ross stares at him.

Madman stares back.

John Phillips: "I don't know if we've ever heard Madman Szalinski talk like this."

Mark Bravo: "Because I don't think we're looking at the same Madman Szalinski anymore."

Ross looks down.

At the empty chair.

He nods once.

Chris Ross: "Nice to know I grabbed this chair for nothing."

Ross folds it.

Then suddenly hurls it toward the entrance ramp.

CLANG!

The chair crashes harmlessly several feet short of Madman.

Madman doesn't move.

Ross doesn't charge.

Instead...

He smiles.

That unsettling Reaper smile.

Chris Ross: "Okay."

A beat.

Chris Ross: "You're a sore loser."

Madman's expression changes.

Chris Ross: "You lost to the man I affectionately call the Fake Reaper."

Chris Ross: "A guy I broke mentally."

Ross begins slowly pacing.

Chris Ross: "And I could come charging up that ramp right now."

He glances at the chair lying on the steel.

Chris Ross: "Pick that up."

Chris Ross: "Swing it until somebody stops me."

Ross stops.

Chris Ross: "But that's obvious."

He looks directly at Madman.

Chris Ross: "And you just made this a lot easier."

Madman tilts his head.

Chris Ross: "Because now I know."

Ross' voice gets quieter.

Chris Ross: "I know exactly what you are."

A pause.

Chris Ross: "I know exactly what you want."

Another.

Chris Ross: "And most importantly..."

Ross' smile grows.

Chris Ross: "...I know where to put your name."

The crowd begins reacting before Ross even says it.

Madman's expression hardens.

Chris Ross: "Congratulations, Madman Szalinski."

Ross steps toward the hard camera.

Chris Ross: "You're on The Reaper's list."

The arena erupts.

Ross lowers his voice further.

Chris Ross: "And you know what that means."

Madman says nothing.

Chris Ross: "You don't get to decide when."

A beat.

Chris Ross: "You don't get to decide where."

Another beat.

Chris Ross: "And you damn sure don't get to decide how."

Ross' eyes remain locked on Madman.

Chris Ross: "Anytime."

The crowd joins him.

Chris Ross: "Any place."

Louder.

Chris Ross: "Anywhere."

Ross smiles.

Chris Ross: "The Reaper can strike."

Madman stares down from the stage.

No fear.

No retreat.

Just a man who seems perfectly willing to find out.

Ross slowly raises the UTA Championship.

Then—

Black.

The entire arena disappears into darkness.

John Phillips: "What the—"

A few seconds pass.

The lights return.

The ring is empty.

Chris Ross is gone.

The microphone lies on the canvas.

His chair remains in the center of the ring.

The second chair remains on the ramp.

Madman Szalinski hasn't moved.

He looks at the empty ring.

Then slowly smiles.

Mark Bravo: "Madman Szalinski wanted everyone to understand that the superhero is gone."

John Phillips: "And Chris Ross just made something equally clear."

The camera tightens on Madman.

John Phillips: "Whatever Madman Szalinski has become..."

A beat.

John Phillips: "...The Reaper is coming for him."

Madman continues staring toward the empty ring as the broadcast fades away.

The Only Champion That Matters

Segment

The broadcast cuts away from ringside.

Backstage.

Inside Hakuryu's locker room.

The atmosphere is almost unnaturally quiet.

No pacing.

No last-minute preparation.

No nervous energy before the opening match.

Hakuryu sits completely composed.

The UTA United States Championship rests prominently on a stand beside him.

His disciple and manager, Sinja, stands nearby with his hands folded in front of him.

Neither man is looking at the camera.

Their attention belongs to the television mounted on the wall.

On the screen...

Highlights from last week's Road to the Throne.

Chris Ross outside the ring.

Mikey Unlikely inside.

The count rising.

Ross trying to reach the apron.

Ten.

The footage ends.

Then immediately starts again.

Chris Ross...

being pinned by Mikey Unlikely.

The footage loops repeatedly.

Hakuryu watches in complete silence, a faint smirk growing across his face with every replay.

Sinja glances toward his master.

Hakuryu finally speaks.

Hakuryu (Japanese):

????UTA??????????????

Sinja chuckles before translating.

Sinja:

"This... is your World Champion?"

"How embarrassing."

"The supposed face of the company... flat on his back."

"The man entrusted to represent the pinnacle of UTA..."

"Counted out."

"Defeated."

"Humiliated."

"And this company expects Hakuryu to respect him?"

The replay shows Ross losing once again.

Hakuryu slowly applauds the television with the most sarcastic clap imaginable.

Once.

Twice.

Three times.

Then he stops.

Hakuryu (Japanese):

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Sinja:

"If the World Champion can be beaten that easily..."

"Then there is no king."

"There is only a man wearing borrowed gold."

"Chris Ross calls himself the top champion..."

"Yet one bad night was all it took to expose him."

"Hakuryu doesn't see greatness."

"He sees weakness pretending to wear a crown."

"The United States Championship..."

Sinja points toward Hakuryu's shoulder.

Sinja:

"THAT..."

"is the championship that carries dignity."

"That is the championship defended by a warrior."

"That is the championship that has never embarrassed itself."

"In the Ring King Tournament..."

"There is only ONE champion that matters."

"The United States Champion."

"Hakuryu."

Hakuryu rises.

Slowly.

Deliberately.

He walks across the locker room toward a large Ring King tournament bracket hanging on the wall.

His eyes move across the names.

Not with curiosity.

With contempt.

As though none of them deserve to share the same paper as his own.

Hakuryu (Japanese):

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Sinja joins him beside the bracket.

Sinja:

"People continue asking who will become Ring King."

"Hakuryu has a better question."

"Why are they pretending this tournament has more than one possible ending?"

"Look at this field."

"A collection of mediocrity pretending destiny belongs to them."

"Every single one of them is competing for second place."

"Because first place already belongs to The White Dragon."

Hakuryu places his finger on one particular name.

Kirsty McKinney.

His opponent tonight.

Hakuryu laughs quietly.

Hakuryu (Japanese):

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A long pause.

Then...

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Sinja smiles.

Sinja:

"Kirsty McKinney..."

"Congratulations."

"Not because you're going to win."

"That possibility never existed."

"Congratulations because you have been blessed with the greatest honor your career will ever know..."

"Sharing a ring with Hakuryu."

"Years from now, when people ask what the greatest moment of your wrestling career was..."

"You'll be forced to answer..."

"The night Hakuryu destroyed me."

Hakuryu turns away from the bracket.

He sits again.

Calmly tightening the tape around his wrist.

Hakuryu (Japanese):

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Sinja:

"Master Hakuryu doesn't believe in wasting time."

"He won't toy with you."

"He won't extend your suffering simply for entertainment."

"He will do what he always does."

"Break you."

"Dispose of you."

"Move on."

Hakuryu finishes tightening the tape.

He slowly raises his hand to chest level.

Then makes a slicing motion across his neck.

Hakuryu (Japanese):

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Sinja's grin grows wider.

Sinja:

"He says..."

"He's collecting your head."

"Not literally..."

"But as another trophy."

"Another reminder of someone arrogant enough to believe they belonged in the same tournament."

"Hakuryu isn't building a résumé..."

"He's building a graveyard."

"Every opponent becomes another monument to his superiority."

Hakuryu reaches for the United States Championship.

He lifts it from the stand.

Studies the faceplate for a moment.

Then turns directly toward the camera for the first time.

Hakuryu (Japanese):

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Sinja steps directly into frame.

Hakuryu remains behind him.

The championship now draped over his shoulder.

Sinja:

"Chris Ross lost the right to call himself the standard."

"When the supposed World Champion falls..."

"Someone else must become the face of this company."

"That someone is standing right beside me."

"Hakuryu doesn't need nostalgia."

"He doesn't need excuses."

"He doesn't need luck."

"He doesn't need the fans."

"He simply needs another opponent."

"Kirsty McKinney..."

"You're next."

"Then another."

"Then another."

"Until there is no debate left."

"Not about the Ring King."

"Not about the best champion."

"Not about the best wrestler."

"There will only be one undeniable truth..."

Sinja points toward Hakuryu.

Sinja:

"Hakuryu isn't chasing the throne."

"Hakuryu IS the throne."

Hakuryu closes his eyes.

Just for a moment.

The television continues playing behind him.

Chris Ross struggling to reach the ring.

The count reaching ten.

Mikey Unlikely celebrating.

Hakuryu opens his eyes.

Looks directly into the camera.

And delivers one final sentence.

Hakuryu (Japanese):

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Sinja nods.

Sinja:

"Bow."

Hakuryu continues staring into the camera.

No smile.

No movement.

The United States Championship rests across his shoulder.

Behind him...

The television starts the replay again.

The screen fades to black.

We return to ringside.

John Phillips: "Well, confidence certainly isn't going to be an issue for Hakuryu tonight."

Mark Bravo: "Confidence? Hakuryu just dismissed the World Champion, the entire Ring King field, and Kirsty McKinney's whole career in about five minutes."

John Phillips: "And Kirsty McKinney is the one who gets the opportunity to respond."

Mark Bravo: "Not with words."

A beat.

Mark Bravo: "She's about to get him in the ring."

Him?

Segment

Inside the First Class locker room.

Maxwell Jett sits on a bench in front of an open locker, already dressed for competition.

His boots are laced.

His wrists are taped.

Everything about the setup looks organized to the point of obsession.

Across the room, Jacoby Jacobs lounges against a locker while Darian Darrington paces nearby.

Maxwell finishes adjusting the tape around one wrist.

Jacoby Jacobs: "You good?"

Maxwell doesn't look up.

Maxwell Jett: "Obviously."

Darian stops pacing.

Darian Darrington: "I'm just saying. Emily ain't exactly somebody you wanna sleep on."

That gets Maxwell's attention.

He slowly looks up.

Almost offended by the suggestion.

Maxwell Jett: "Emily Hightower?"

Jacoby gives a small shrug.

Jacoby Jacobs: "Yeah."

Maxwell Jett: "You're asking me if I'm ready for Emily Hightower?"

Maxwell actually laughs.

Short.

Dismissive.

Maxwell Jett: "Guys, please."

He stands.

Maxwell Jett: "I understand that this tournament has apparently convinced everybody that we're supposed to pretend every matchup is some monumental clash between equals."

He shakes his head.

Maxwell Jett: "It isn't."

Maxwell Jett: "Emily Hightower is a joke opponent."

Darian raises an eyebrow.

Darian Darrington: "A joke opponent who's the Women's Champion."

Jacoby adds immediately—

Jacoby Jacobs: "And Hardcore Champion."

Maxwell stares at both of them.

For a second, he genuinely looks insulted.

Maxwell Jett: "Okay."

He points toward himself.

Maxwell Jett: "Former."

A beat.

Maxwell Jett: "UTA."

Another.

Maxwell Jett: "Champion."

Maxwell spreads his arms.

Maxwell Jett: "Do we really need to explain the hierarchy here?"

Jacoby smirks.

Maxwell Jett: "Women's Champion."

He holds one hand low.

Maxwell Jett: "Hardcore Champion."

The hand stays exactly where it is.

Then Maxwell raises his other hand considerably higher.

Maxwell Jett: "UTA Champion."

He looks between them.

Maxwell Jett: "That is the championship."

Maxwell Jett: "The one that says you're better than everybody else."

Maxwell Jett: "I've already been there."

He gives a smug little smile.

Maxwell Jett: "Emily has a couple belts."

Maxwell Jett: "Cute."

Darian laughs.

Jacoby pushes himself away from the locker.

Jacoby Jacobs: "Alright, alright."

He gestures between himself and Darian.

Jacoby Jacobs: "You want us out there?"

Darian Darrington: "Yeah. Just in case."

Maxwell's expression immediately changes.

Maxwell Jett: "In case of what?"

Neither answers immediately.

Maxwell Jett: "Seriously."

He looks toward Darian.

Maxwell Jett: "What exactly do you think Emily Hightower is going to do that requires backup?"

Darian raises both hands.

Darian Darrington: "I'm just offering."

Maxwell Jett: "Declined."

Maxwell turns toward the mirror.

Checks himself.

Straightens the waistband of his gear.

Maxwell Jett: "I don't need two people standing outside the ring while I beat Emily Hightower."

Maxwell Jett: "If anything, it'd make this look competitive."

Jacoby and Darian exchange a glance.

Maxwell catches it in the mirror.

Maxwell Jett: "What?"

Neither speaks.

Maxwell turns around.

Maxwell Jett: "What?"

Jacoby scratches the side of his face.

Jacoby Jacobs: "Well..."

He looks toward Darian.

Jacoby Jacobs: "What about..."

A pause.

Jacoby Jacobs: "...you know."

Maxwell's face goes blank.

Maxwell Jett: "What?"

Darian looks at Jacoby.

Then Maxwell.

Darian Darrington: "Yeah."

Another pause.

Darian Darrington: "You know."

Darian Darrington: "Him."

For the first time in the segment...

Maxwell doesn't immediately have a sarcastic response.

Jacoby lowers his voice slightly.

Jacoby Jacobs: "Is he here tonight?"

Silence.

The question hangs in the room.

Maxwell looks at Jacoby.

Then Darian.

Whatever they're discussing...

The audience clearly isn't supposed to know yet.

Then Maxwell smiles.

Small.

Knowing.

Maxwell Jett: "You two worry too much."

Darian frowns.

Darian Darrington: "That ain't an answer."

Maxwell Jett: "It's the only answer you're getting."

Maxwell reaches into the locker and grabs his entrance jacket.

He slips it on.

Jacoby Jacobs: "So...?"

Maxwell adjusts the collar.

Then looks at both men through the mirror.

Maxwell Jett: "When the time is right..."

A beat.

Maxwell Jett: "...you'll know."

Jacoby and Darian exchange another look.

Maxwell smiles at his reflection.

Maxwell Jett: "Until then?"

He turns toward the door.

Maxwell Jett: "Try not to ruin the surprise."

Maxwell exits.

The door closes behind him.

Jacoby watches it for a second.

Jacoby Jacobs: "I hate when he does that."

Darian nods.

Darian Darrington: "Every damn time."

The camera lingers on the two members of First Class.

Both clearly know more than we do.

But neither says another word.

Fade out.

Hakuryu vs. Kirsty McKinney

Match

The camera returns to ringside as the crowd settles in for the next first-round matchup in the 2026 Ring King tournament.

John Phillips: "We continue first-round action now, and this may be one of the more interesting stylistic matchups we've seen in this tournament."

Mark Bravo: "Absolutely. Because Kirsty McKinney isn't coming out here trying to have anybody's idea of a pretty wrestling match. She's coming out here to put you on the mat, keep you there, and make you absolutely miserable."

The opening growl of "In Walks Barbarella" by Clutch hits the arena.

Kirsty McKinney steps through the curtain.

No fireworks.

No dramatic pause.

No attempt to manufacture a moment.

Just Kirsty.

She stops briefly at the top of the entranceway, looking out across the crowd with that almost-neutral expression of hers.

A few fans near the aisle reach toward her.

Kirsty gives them a sideways glance.

Then starts walking.

John Phillips: "Kirsty McKinney earned her place in this tournament by defeating Valentina Blaze back on August seventh in Philadelphia."

Mark Bravo: "And anybody who looked at that match and thought Kirsty was just filling out a tournament bracket wasn't paying attention."

Kirsty's walk becomes a light jog as she approaches ringside.

John Phillips: "We're talking about one of the most accomplished amateur wrestlers to ever enter the United Toughness Alliance. Kirsty spent years dominating on the mat before making the transition into professional wrestling."

Mark Bravo: "And here's what makes her dangerous tonight. She doesn't care if what she does looks impressive. She cares if it works."

Kirsty slides underneath the bottom rope.

She rolls smoothly onto her knees.

Then stands.

No turnbuckle pose.

No playing to the crowd.

Instead, Kirsty drops into a deep squat.

Back up.

Another.

She rolls one shoulder.

Then the other.

A strand of blonde hair falls across her face.

Kirsty flicks it away with visible irritation.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu has the size advantage. He has the striking advantage. He has considerably more experience in this environment."

Kirsty moves toward her corner and begins stretching against the ropes.

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, but none of that changes what happens if Kirsty gets underneath you."

Phillips pauses.

John Phillips: "And we've seen that already."

Mark Bravo: "Exactly. Waistlock. Trip. Ride. Cradle. Suddenly you're staring at the lights wondering how somebody you outweigh just folded you in half."

Kirsty releases the ropes.

She turns toward the entrance.

Her expression remains almost completely unchanged.

Focused.

Maybe slightly annoyed that everyone is taking so long.

John Phillips: "Kirsty McKinney isn't the favorite here tonight."

Mark Bravo: "She doesn't need to be."

Kirsty lowers herself slightly into her stance.

Waiting.

Mark Bravo: "She just needs Hakuryu to give her one mistake."

The camera pushes closer.

Kirsty's eyes remain locked on the entranceway.

John Phillips: "Kirsty McKinney is ready."

A beat.

John Phillips: "And now comes the White Dragon."

Kirsty McKinney remains in her corner.

Her eyes stay fixed on the entrance.

Then—

GOOOOOONG.

The lights inside Rocket Arena go black.

The crowd immediately responds with a wave of boos.

John Phillips: "And here he comes."

GOOOOOONG.

A white spotlight suddenly appears near the entrance ramp.

White smoke begins rolling across the stage.

Mark Bravo: "Hakuryu spent a good portion of tonight telling us this tournament is essentially a formality. According to him, everybody else is competing for second place."

Another gong echoes throughout the arena.

A figure emerges through the smoke.

Sinja.

White suit.

White face paint.

He walks forward before stopping at the edge of the ramp.

The spiritual chants begin.

And from behind him...

The White Dragon emerges.

Hakuryu.

Full pilgrimage garments.

White robes covering his body.

The takuhatsugasa hat concealing his face.

Shakujo staff in one hand.

Kongo-zue in the other.

And around his waist...

The UTA United States Championship.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu didn't have to qualify for this tournament. As United States Champion, his place in the field was automatic."

Mark Bravo: "And if you listened to Sinja earlier tonight, they don't believe Hakuryu should have to prove he belongs here at all. They believe everybody else should have to prove they belong in the same tournament as him."

Hakuryu and Sinja begin their slow procession toward the ring.

Hakuryu doesn't acknowledge the boos.

Doesn't acknowledge the hands reaching over the barricade.

His pace never changes.

Inside the ring, Kirsty watches.

She doesn't appear impressed.

She doesn't appear intimidated.

If anything...

She looks impatient.

John Phillips: "And that's the part I'm interested in. Kirsty McKinney heard everything Hakuryu and Sinja had to say earlier."

Mark Bravo: "I'm not sure Kirsty cares."

John Phillips: "That may actually be the perfect attitude to have."

Hakuryu reaches ringside.

He stops.

Slowly raises his head.

For the first time, the brim of the hat lifts enough for his eyes to become visible.

They immediately find Kirsty.

Kirsty meets his stare.

Neither moves.

Mark Bravo: "There it is."

John Phillips: "Hakuryu has finally gotten a look at the woman he promised to destroy."

Sinja moves toward the ring steps.

Hakuryu brings his hands together in prayer.

His head lowers.

Words are quietly spoken beneath his breath.

Then he climbs the steps.

Sinja reaches the apron first and pulls the middle and top ropes apart.

Hakuryu enters.

Kirsty doesn't retreat to the opposite side of the ring.

She stays exactly where she is.

Hakuryu walks to the center.

He removes the takuhatsugasa.

Then the outer garments.

Piece by piece.

Each is handed carefully to Sinja.

Finally, Hakuryu removes the United States Championship.

He holds it in both hands.

Looks down at the faceplate.

Then raises it.

The crowd boos loudly.

Hakuryu doesn't care.

He turns.

And his eyes settle on Kirsty again.

Kirsty's response?

A small roll of the eyes.

She flicks her hair away from her face.

Mark Bravo: "Ha!"

John Phillips: "I'm not sure that's the reaction Hakuryu was looking for."

Mark Bravo: "She's spent her entire life dealing with somebody standing across from her thinking they're the one who's finally going to beat her. Hakuryu's presentation might scare a lot of people. Kirsty looks annoyed that it's delaying the bell."

Hakuryu lowers the championship.

For just a moment...

There is the faintest hint of something behind his expression.

Not anger.

Interest.

Sinja takes the championship from him and exits to ringside.

Hakuryu backs into his corner.

He lowers himself.

Hands together once more.

One final prayer.

Across the ring, Kirsty drops into her wrestling stance.

Low.

Balanced.

Ready to shoot.

Hakuryu opens his eyes.

The two stare across the ring at one another.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu says Kirsty McKinney should consider it an honor just to share a ring with him."

Mark Bravo: "She's about to get the opportunity to change his opinion."

The referee looks toward Kirsty.

Ready.

Then Hakuryu.

Ready.

Sinja watches from the floor.

John Phillips: "One of these two is going to Round Two."

The referee signals for the bell.

DING! DING! DING!

Neither competitor moves immediately.

Kirsty McKinney stays low in her stance.

Hakuryu stands more upright.

Calm.

Patient.

Studying.

Kirsty takes one step forward.

Hakuryu takes one step to his right.

She follows.

Hakuryu circles.

Kirsty keeps herself between him and the center of the ring.

John Phillips: "Very different approaches right from the opening bell."

Mark Bravo: "Hakuryu wants information. Kirsty wants contact."

Kirsty suddenly closes the distance.

Hakuryu reaches for a collar-and-elbow tie-up—

But Kirsty immediately ducks underneath.

Waistlock.

Hakuryu widens his base.

Kirsty drops her weight.

Outside trip!

Hakuryu hits the canvas.

Before he can turn over, Kirsty is already on top of him.

Chest against his back.

One arm around the waist.

The other controlling the wrist.

John Phillips: "And there's that amateur background!"

Hakuryu plants a knee underneath himself.

Kirsty immediately hooks the ankle.

Hakuryu drops back down.

Kirsty rides him.

Hakuryu tries again.

Same result.

Kirsty drags him flat.

The crowd begins to react.

At ringside, Sinja's expression tightens.

Mark Bravo: "This is exactly what we were talking about. Nothing flashy. Kirsty just took away Hakuryu's base and now she's making a two-hundred-forty-pound man carry her weight."

Hakuryu works toward the ropes.

Kirsty recognizes it immediately.

She shifts her hips.

Pulls Hakuryu away.

Then spins around his body and hooks the near leg.

Cradle!

ONE!

TWO—

Hakuryu kicks free.

Both competitors scramble back to their feet.

Kirsty immediately drops back into her stance.

Hakuryu doesn't.

He stands across from her.

Watching.

Kirsty flicks the hair from her face.

Hakuryu tilts his head slightly.

John Phillips: "That was almost two."

Mark Bravo: "And look at Hakuryu."

Sinja calls something from ringside in Japanese.

Hakuryu raises one hand.

Not toward Kirsty.

Toward Sinja.

It's enough.

Sinja goes silent.

Mark Bravo: "He doesn't want help figuring this out."

Hakuryu brings his hands together briefly.

A quiet prayer.

Then motions for Kirsty to come forward.

Kirsty's eyebrows rise.

Almost as if to say:

Fine.

She shoots.

This time Hakuryu is waiting.

He sprawls.

Hard.

Kirsty's momentum stops underneath him.

Hakuryu immediately circles toward her back—

But Kirsty catches his wrist.

Rolls through.

Hakuryu follows.

Kirsty attempts to capture the arm.

Hakuryu pulls free.

Both rise again.

This time Hakuryu strikes.

THWACK!

A sharp kick catches Kirsty across the thigh.

She winces.

Hakuryu doesn't rush.

Another kick.

THWACK!

Kirsty's leg buckles slightly.

Hakuryu steps forward—

Kirsty dives underneath him!

Double leg!

Hakuryu goes down again!

The crowd pops.

Kirsty climbs immediately into position.

Hakuryu tries to roll.

She follows.

He tries the opposite direction.

She follows that too.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu can't shake her!"

Mark Bravo: "Because this is her world! Hakuryu's a fantastic professional wrestler, but Kirsty has spent most of her life learning how to make sure another human being can't get away from her."

Hakuryu gets one foot underneath himself.

Then the other.

Kirsty maintains the rear waistlock.

Hakuryu reaches down.

Tries to peel her hands apart.

Kirsty suddenly explodes upward.

GERMAN SUPLEX!

Hakuryu lands across his shoulders!

Kirsty maintains the waistlock.

Rolls through.

Hakuryu realizes what's coming and grabs the top rope.

The referee immediately calls for the break.

Kirsty sighs.

She releases him.

Then backs away with an exaggerated flounce of irritation.

Mark Bravo: "She looks personally offended by rope breaks."

John Phillips: "They're part of professional wrestling."

Mark Bravo: "I don't think Kirsty considers that a good excuse."

Hakuryu remains against the ropes.

He rubs the back of his neck.

Kirsty gestures for him to come away from them.

The crowd laughs.

Hakuryu looks at her.

Then...

He smiles.

Not mockingly.

Not the contempt he showed earlier tonight.

A small, genuine smile.

John Phillips: "Wait a minute."

Mark Bravo: "I think Kirsty McKinney just earned something Hakuryu doesn't give out very often."

Hakuryu steps away from the ropes.

He bows his head slightly toward Kirsty.

Kirsty stares at him.

She gives the smallest shrug imaginable.

Then immediately shoots for his legs again.

Mark Bravo: "Apparently she doesn't care."

This time Hakuryu sidesteps!

Kirsty catches herself before going through the ropes.

She turns—

SUPERKICK!

Hakuryu catches her flush!

Kirsty crashes to the mat!

John Phillips: "OH! Hakuryu found the opening!"

Hakuryu drops into the cover.

ONE!

TWO!

Kirsty kicks out!

Hakuryu sits beside her.

No frustration.

No disbelief.

Instead, he brings his hands together.

Prays.

Then rises.

Mark Bravo: "That's the White Dragon. He watched. He waited. He learned the timing on Kirsty's shot, and when she gave him the opening, he took her head off."

Kirsty rolls onto her stomach.

Hakuryu grabs her by the waist and pulls her up.

Kirsty immediately starts fighting his grip.

Hakuryu muscles her upward—

But Kirsty shifts her weight in mid-lift!

She lands behind him!

Rear waistlock!

Hakuryu throws an elbow backward.

Kirsty ducks it.

She changes levels.

Hooks one leg.

Hakuryu hops desperately toward the ropes.

Kirsty drives forward.

Hakuryu turns at the last second—

And both tumble through the ropes!

They crash to the floor!

The crowd rises.

John Phillips: "Both competitors spill outside!"

Sinja immediately moves toward Hakuryu.

Kirsty is already pushing herself up near the barricade.

Hakuryu gets to one knee.

Sinja reaches toward him—

Hakuryu waves him away.

He wants to stand himself.

Sinja reluctantly backs off.

Kirsty gets upright first.

Hakuryu follows.

They look at each other across the ringside floor.

Kirsty rubs her jaw from the earlier superkick.

Hakuryu rolls his neck after the suplex.

For the first time tonight...

Neither looks dismissive of the other.

John Phillips: "This has turned into exactly the kind of match we hoped it would."

Mark Bravo: "Hakuryu told Kirsty earlier tonight that sharing the ring with him would be the greatest honor of her career."

Kirsty steps forward.

Hakuryu does the same.

Mark Bravo: "I don't think he's looking at her like that anymore."

The referee begins the count from inside the ring.

ONE!

TWO!

Hakuryu and Kirsty circle one another on the floor.

THREE!

And then...

A reaction begins somewhere in the crowd.

Not huge at first.

Just enough to pull the camera's attention toward the entranceway.

John Phillips: "Wait a second."

Hakuryu doesn't notice.

Sinja does.

His head snaps toward the ramp.

The camera follows his stare.

Someone has stepped through the curtain.

Mark Bravo: "Oh, you've got to be kidding me."

It's Jed Dye.

Jed stands at the top of the entranceway.

And the moment Sinja sees him...

his entire demeanor changes.

FOUR!

Jed Dye starts down the ramp.

That familiar strut.

That mischievous, self-satisfied expression.

Sinja immediately steps away from Hakuryu.

John Phillips: "Jed Dye has absolutely no business out here!"

Mark Bravo: "You knew this wasn't over. Hakuryu took the United States Championship from Yoshii at One Last Stop, and Jed Dye hasn't exactly handled that loss with grace."

FIVE!

Hakuryu and Kirsty both hear the referee's count.

Kirsty slides underneath the bottom rope.

Hakuryu follows a moment later.

The count ends.

But Sinja isn't watching the match anymore.

He's watching Jed.

Jed reaches the bottom of the ramp.

Sinja immediately steps directly into his path.

Jed stops.

Jed Dye: "Excuse me."

Sinja doesn't move.

Jed points past him toward the ring.

Jed Dye: "Spectator."

He points toward himself.

Jed Dye: "I'm merely here in an observational capacity."

Sinja says something sharply in Japanese.

Jed adjusts his jacket.

Jed Dye: "I don't know what you just said, but I'm going to assume it was unnecessarily hostile."

Mark Bravo: "Jed Dye coming to ringside and calling himself an innocent spectator is like bringing a raccoon into your kitchen and insisting he's just there to watch."

Inside the ring, Kirsty takes advantage of Hakuryu's momentary glance toward ringside.

She shoots low.

Single leg!

Hakuryu immediately drops his weight.

Kirsty keeps driving.

Hakuryu hops backward on one foot.

Kirsty turns the corner—

And dumps him to the canvas!

She follows him down.

Hooks the leg.

Stacks him!

ONE!

TWO!

Hakuryu powers out!

Both competitors scramble up.

Kirsty grabs the waist.

Hakuryu blocks.

Back elbow!

Kirsty ducks!

She tries to drag him backward—

Hakuryu catches the ropes!

The referee orders the break.

Kirsty releases immediately.

She throws her head back with an irritated sigh.

John Phillips: "Kirsty nearly caught him again!"

Mark Bravo: "And that's why Hakuryu needs to forget Jed Dye is out here. Kirsty McKinney does not need much of an opening."

Hakuryu steps away from the ropes.

Kirsty comes forward.

Hakuryu catches her with a kick to the body!

Kirsty doubles over.

Hakuryu follows with a sharp kick across the chest!

Kirsty stumbles backward.

Hakuryu advances.

Another kick!

Kirsty catches the leg!

The crowd pops.

Hakuryu balances on one foot.

Kirsty sweeps the standing leg!

Hakuryu goes down!

Kirsty immediately dives on him.

She threads one leg around his.

Hooks the opposite ankle.

Hakuryu recognizes the danger and rolls toward his stomach.

Kirsty follows.

She reaches for the neck.

John Phillips: "She's looking for the Pitty Choke!"

Hakuryu gets his chin down.

Kirsty keeps working.

One arm trying to snake underneath.

Hakuryu crawls.

Inch by inch.

Kirsty drags him backward.

Hakuryu reaches again.

His fingertips brush the bottom rope.

Not enough.

Kirsty pulls him back!

The crowd gets louder.

Hakuryu twists his hips.
Turns into Kirsty.
He creates just enough space—
And drives a knee into her ribs!
Kirsty's grip breaks.
Hakuryu rolls away.
Both rise.
Kirsty charges—
TORNADO KICK!
It catches her across the side of the head!
Kirsty drops!
John Phillips: "What a shot!"
Hakuryu doesn't cover.
He stands over Kirsty.
Hands slowly coming together.
Prayer.
Then he looks down at her.
There is no earlier contempt.
No amusement.
He understands now.
Kirsty McKinney belongs here.
Mark Bravo: "This isn't the match Hakuryu promised us earlier."
John Phillips: "Not even close."
Mark Bravo: "He said break her, dispose of her, move on. Kirsty's made him work for every inch."
Hakuryu pulls Kirsty up.
He hooks her.
Lift—
Kirsty blocks!
Hakuryu tries again.
Kirsty drops her hips.
Then explodes underneath him!
BELLY-TO-BELLY SUPLEX!
The crowd erupts!

Hakuryu crashes hard!

Kirsty rolls over and hooks both legs!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

Hakuryu gets a shoulder up!

John Phillips: "That was close!"

Kirsty sits beside him.

She brushes her hair out of her face.

Her expression?

Bored.

Almost insultingly so.

But she's breathing harder now.

So is Hakuryu.

At ringside, Jed Dye applauds.

Slowly.

Deliberately.

Sinja turns toward him.

Jed Dye: "Excellent competitive wrestling."

Sinja steps toward him.

Jed Dye: "What?"

Jed spreads his arms innocently.

Jed Dye: "Am I prohibited from appreciating athletic excellence?"

Sinja points toward the ramp.

Jed looks at it.

Then back at Sinja.

Jed Dye: "No."

Sinja points again.

More forcefully.

Jed Dye: "I purchased a ticket."

Mark Bravo: "Did he?"

John Phillips: "I sincerely doubt it."

Jed attempts to walk around Sinja.

Sinja moves with him.

Jed tries the other direction.

Sinja blocks him again.

Jed's smile disappears.

Jed Dye: "You are interfering with an authorized managerial observation."

Sinja shoves him backward.

The crowd reacts.

John Phillips: "Whoa!"

Jed looks down at Sinja's hands.

Then slowly back up.

Jed Dye: "You have made a procedural error."

Jed shoves Sinja back!

Sinja immediately comes forward!

The two begin jawing at one another.

Another shove from Sinja!

Jed returns it!

Mark Bravo: "And there goes the innocent spectator routine!"

Inside the ring, Kirsty has Hakuryu trapped in a rear waistlock.

Hakuryu fights the hands.

Kirsty tries to lift.

Hakuryu blocks.

He throws his weight forward.

Kirsty maintains control.

Hakuryu reaches back.

Grabs her head.

Snapmare!

Kirsty rolls through to her feet.

Hakuryu turns—

CORKSCREW FOREARM!

Kirsty blasts him!

Hakuryu staggers into the ropes!

Kirsty charges again.

Hakuryu ducks.

Kirsty hits the opposite ropes.
She comes back—
Hakuryu catches her!
He lifts!
Kirsty fights in his arms!
Hakuryu adjusts.
She slips behind him!
Waistlock!
Hakuryu reaches for the ropes—
Kirsty pulls him away!
GERMAN SUPLEX!
Hakuryu flips through the impact and lands awkwardly on his knees!
Kirsty turns—
SUPERKICK!
Hakuryu catches her flush!
Both competitors collapse!
The crowd rises to its feet.
John Phillips: "What a match!"
Mark Bravo: "Kirsty has pushed the United States Champion, but Hakuryu keeps finding answers!"
Hakuryu rolls onto his side.
Kirsty lies on her back.
The referee checks both competitors.
Neither stays down.
Hakuryu reaches his knees first.
Kirsty isn't far behind.
At ringside—
Jed and Sinja are still arguing.
Neither has noticed what's happening inside the ring.
Hakuryu sees them.
His eyes narrow.
Sinja shoves Jed again.
Jed comes right back.
Hakuryu looks from them...

...to Kirsty...

...then back toward Sinja.

His patience finally breaks.

Hakuryu steps through the ropes.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu is leaving the ring!"

Mark Bravo: "He's had enough of this!"

Hakuryu drops to the floor.

He marches directly toward Sinja and Jed.

Sinja notices his master approaching.

Jed does too.

Hakuryu says something sharp in Japanese.

Sinja immediately backs off half a step.

Jed doesn't.

He points at Sinja.

Jed Dye: "Your subordinate initiated physical contact."

Hakuryu steps between them.

Jed takes a step backward.

Sinja's face twists with anger.

Hakuryu turns toward him.

Another sharp command.

Sinja nods.

For a moment...

It looks like the situation may actually be over.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu needs to get back in that ring. Kirsty McKinney is recovering and the referee is counting."

ONE!

Hakuryu turns toward the ring.

Behind him...

Jed smirks.

Sinja sees it.

Stops.

Jed gives him the smallest little wave.

Sinja's eyes narrow.

TWO!

Hakuryu reaches for the apron.

Sinja suddenly reaches into his pocket.

Mark Bravo: "What's Sinja doing?"

His hand comes back out clenched around something.

A fine powder.

Jed's expression changes immediately.

John Phillips: "Wait a minute!"

Sinja throws it with force toward Jed Dye's face!

Jed ducks!

The powder sails past him—

And directly into the face of Hakuryu!

John Phillips: "OH NO!"

Hakuryu recoils!

Both hands fly to his eyes!

Sinja freezes.

His face drops.

Absolute horror.

Mark Bravo: "HE GOT HAKURYU!"

John Phillips: "Sinja was aiming for Jed Dye and he blinded his own man!"

Hakuryu staggers backward.

He can't see.

He swings one arm blindly.

Sinja immediately reaches for him.

Sinja: "Hakuryu!"

Hakuryu shoves him away on instinct.

Jed looks from Sinja...

...to Hakuryu...

...and realizes exactly what has just fallen into his lap.

THREE!

Jed moves.

He gets behind Hakuryu.

Grabs him around the waist.

John Phillips: "JED! DON'T!"

Hakuryu tries to turn—

But he can't see him!

Jed drives forward and sends Hakuryu underneath the bottom rope!

Hakuryu rolls into the ring!

Jed immediately throws both hands into the air and backs away.

Mark Bravo: "Jed Dye just put him back in the ring!"

John Phillips: "And look who's waiting!"

Kirsty McKinney is already on her feet.

She sees Hakuryu stumbling blindly toward the center.

She sees Sinja outside.

She sees Jed.

And Kirsty doesn't waste a second trying to figure out whose fault any of this is.

She shoots.

Hakuryu can't defend it.

Kirsty takes him down!

Hakuryu immediately tries to scramble away.

Kirsty follows.

She hooks the leg.

Threads herself around him.

Mark Bravo: "SHE'S GOT HIM!"

Kirsty cinches the SHEAR CRADLE!

Hakuryu's shoulders are trapped!

He kicks blindly.

Tries to shift his weight.

But Kirsty's positioning is perfect.

The referee drops!

ONE!

Sinja realizes what's happening.

He lunges toward the apron!

TWO!

Jed catches Sinja by the jacket and yanks him backward!

Sinja spins around furiously—

THREE!

DING! DING! DING!

Rocket Arena erupts!

Kirsty immediately releases the cradle.

She rolls away from Hakuryu and sits upright.

For perhaps half a second...

even she looks surprised.

Then that familiar expression returns.

Detached.

Irritated.

Almost bored.

John Phillips: "KIRSTY McKINNEY HAS DONE IT!"

Mark Bravo: "THE UNITED STATES CHAMPION IS OUT OF RING KING!"

Kirsty gets to her feet.

The referee raises her arm.

Outside, Sinja stares into the ring.

Then slowly looks down at his own hand.

Traces of powder remain across his fingers.

He knows.

This is his fault.

Jed Dye stands several feet away.

His expression says something entirely different.

Pure satisfaction.

John Phillips: "Sinja tried to throw something into Jed Dye's eyes, Jed moved, and Hakuryu took the full blast!"

Mark Bravo: "Then Jed made damn sure Hakuryu ended up back in that ring! Kirsty didn't ask questions. She saw the opening and she took it!"

Hakuryu rolls onto his knees.

His eyes are watering.

He tries desperately to wipe the substance away.

Sinja slides into the ring.

He approaches cautiously.

Hakuryu hears him.

His head snaps toward the sound.

Sinja stops.

Hakuryu can't see his face.

But Sinja can see Hakuryu's.

And he knows exactly what is waiting once The White Dragon can see again.

Meanwhile, Kirsty McKinney has already slipped through the ropes.

She begins heading up the ramp.

No giant celebration.

No victory lap.

She won.

That's what she came here to do.

John Phillips: "Whatever anyone thinks about how it happened, Kirsty McKinney is going to Round Two."

Mark Bravo: "And let's make something clear. She didn't stumble through this match. Kirsty was giving Hakuryu everything he could handle before Jed Dye ever showed up."

Kirsty stops halfway up the ramp.

She turns.

Looks back toward the ring.

Hakuryu remains on his knees.

Sinja stands several feet away from him.

Jed Dye backs up the opposite side of the aisle with a smug grin plastered across his face.

Kirsty gives the entire scene one long look.

Then rolls her eyes.

She turns around and continues toward the curtain.

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. That seems about right."

The camera returns to Hakuryu.

His eyes beginning to open.

His vision slowly returning.

Sinja doesn't move.

Hakuryu finally focuses enough to see him.

Silence.

Sinja lowers his head.

Hakuryu stares at his disciple.

Then toward the entranceway where Jed Dye disappeared.

The United States Champion says nothing.

He doesn't need to.

John Phillips: "Something tells me this is far from over."

Mark Bravo: "For Kirsty McKinney, though, none of that matters. She's moving on."

A tournament graphic fills the screen.

RING KING — ADVANCING TO ROUND TWO

KIRSTY McKINNEY

Hightower

Segment

The broadcast cuts backstage to the UTA interview area.

Melissa Cartwright stands in front of the Road to the Throne backdrop, microphone in hand.

Standing beside her is the reigning UTA Women's Champion and UTA Hardcore Champion, Emily Hightower.

Both championships are with her tonight, one resting over her shoulder while the other sits around her waist.

Emily is already dressed for competition.

Wrists taped.

Hair pulled back.

No nerves.

She looks like she's about to clock in for another shift.

And tonight's shift comes against a former UTA Champion.

Melissa Cartwright: "Emily, in just a little bit you're going to step into the ring with Maxwell Jett in the first round of the Ring King tournament. Maxwell is a former UTA Champion, and earlier tonight he made it very clear that he doesn't consider you a serious threat. Your response?"

Emily lets out a short laugh.

Not offended.

Almost amused.

Emily Hightower: "Good."

Melissa raises an eyebrow.

Emily Hightower: "Seriously. That's exactly what I wanna hear."

Emily adjusts the Women's Championship on her shoulder.

Emily Hightower: "Maxwell Jett wants to look at me and see the Women's Champion. He wants to look at me and see somebody beneath him because he used to have the UTA Championship around his waist? Let him."

She shrugs.

Emily Hightower: "Makes my job easier."

A small grin crosses Emily's face.

Emily Hightower: "I've dealt with men like Maxwell my whole damn life. Guys who see a woman walk into the yard and figure she must be lost. Then they find out real quick I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be."

Emily pats the Women's Championship.

Then the Hardcore Championship.

Emily Hightower: "I didn't find these in a damn cereal box, Melissa. I earned 'em."

Melissa Cartwright: "There's also First Class to consider. Jacoby Jacobs and Darian Darrington have been a constant presence around Maxwell."

Emily immediately nods.

Emily Hightower: "Oh, I know."

She looks directly into the camera.

Emily Hightower: "And apparently Maxwell's tellin' everybody he doesn't need 'em tonight."

Emily snorts.

Emily Hightower: "Yeah. I'll believe that when I see it."

She shakes her head.

Emily Hightower: "Maxwell wants to walk around with his posse First Class? That's fine. He can bring First Class."

Emily's expression hardens.

Emily Hightower: "I got a family behind me."

That earns a reaction from the Cleveland crowd watching on the arena screens.

Emily Hightower: "They want to get to me? They have to go through my family."

Emily leans slightly toward Melissa's microphone.

Emily Hightower: "My daddy taught me how to fight before Maxwell Jett ever knew my name. Buck and Dakota ain't exactly the kinda people you wanna run into when you're looking to stack the deck. That's the thing about Hightowers."

She gives another little shrug.

Emily Hightower: "We don't need matching suits to know we're family."

Melissa nods before moving to another subject.

Melissa Cartwright: "If you defeat Maxwell tonight, you'll advance into the second round of Ring King. One of the competitors already waiting there is Sol Azteca, who advanced last week with a victory over Selina Santorino."

Emily's entire demeanor changes.

The amusement disappears.

She rolls her eyes.

Emily Hightower: "She won a match. Whoopee!"

Emily gives the most sarcastic little clap imaginable.

Emily Hightower: "She still sucks and shouldn't even be in this tournament!"

Melissa doesn't interrupt.

Emily is just getting started.

Emily Hightower: "I wrestled her! She's a complete no talent! Hell I don't understand how she wasn't canned after the last round of talent releases! In fact Sol Azteca should just plain QUIT!"

The crowd reacts to the venom in Emily's voice.

Emily Hightower: "She's an embarrassment to pro wrestling, is awful in the ring, and quite honestly I think she may be one of the worst wrestlers I ever laid eyes on."

Emily looks straight into the camera.

Emily Hightower: "If Scott Stevens had a brain in his head he would've fired her by now because she is nothing but a waste of money!"

Melissa pauses for a moment.

Melissa Cartwright: "Considering Sol has already advanced, there is a possibility the two of you could eventually meet in this tournament."

Emily smiles.

It's not particularly friendly.

Emily Hightower: "Good."

She taps the faceplate of the Women's Championship.

Emily Hightower: "Then maybe I can do everybody around here a favor."

Emily turns back toward Melissa.

Emily Hightower: "But that's later. Tonight, I'm clockin' in with Maxwell Jett."

She adjusts both championships.

Emily Hightower: "Former UTA Champion. First Class. Biggest damn ego in the building. Whatever."

A grin returns.

Emily Hightower: "Maxwell thinks I'm a joke?"

Emily takes a step toward the camera.

Emily Hightower: "That's fine."

Emily Hightower: "He can laugh all the way to the ring."

A beat.

Emily Hightower: "We'll see how funny I am when that bell rings."

Emily gives Melissa a nod before turning and walking out of frame.

Melissa watches her leave.

Melissa Cartwright: "Emily Hightower meets Maxwell Jett in Ring King first-round action, still to come tonight."

The camera lingers briefly on Melissa before fading away.

Reunited

Segment

The broadcast cuts backstage inside Rocket Arena.

"Classy" Bianca Page walks through one of the arena hallways.

She carries herself with the confidence of someone who believes the building should be considerably more excited about her presence than it currently is.

The camera follows alongside her as she makes her way down the corridor.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "I've got to say I can't say that I'm mad to be back in Cleveland. Ask anyone around this city and they'll tell you I dominated Fight Championship Wrestling when I reigned as the longest Fight Champion of all time. So

that just motivates me more to continue on in this Ring King tournament and make all bow down to the Queen when I walk out holding the trophy, my tiara and sector as I begin my championship reign over all of you."

Bianca cracks a smile.

She continues walking.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Once I'm wearing my tiara I'll start collecting some other kinds of accolades. So the real question is do I want to win the UTA championship or the Women's Championship but I figured why not both? Hell once I do that I can set my sights on the International and the United States championship both of those. The world is truly my oyster..."

Bianca suddenly stops.

Her smile disappears.

She stares at something farther down the hallway.

Then rolls her eyes.

Hard.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Oh! my! God! Who the hell let you in here?!?! I told you so many times to not follow me!!! Why are you so obsessed with me?!?!?!"

The camera pans around.

And finds...

A bubbly blonde face.

Hope Levitt.

Hope isn't following Bianca at all.

She's signing an autograph for a young fan.

Hope raises her head from the autograph, puzzled by the sudden screaming.

Then she realizes who's responsible.

She stares at Bianca for a moment.

A flash of anger crosses Hope's face.

Just as quickly...

It's gone.

Hope beams at the young fan again and finishes signing the autograph.

Hope Levitt: "Hey! So happy to meet my fans, but unless you want to learn a lot of nasty new words, you might want to run back to Mommy and Daddy, okay? And remember? Be good people."

The boy nods.

He quickly dashes toward a couple waiting a short distance away.

Hope waves at them.

She waits.

Only when the family has turned and begun walking away does Hope look back toward Bianca.

Her hands disappear behind her back.

Then...

She skips toward her.

Happily.

Bianca looks increasingly irritated with every bounce.

Hope Levitt: "Bianca! Hiiiiiii! Oh my gosh, when I came here to sign my contract, they told me they had some AMAZING women on the roster. Like Emily Hightower or Sol Azteca or or Kirsty McKinney! But your name didn't come up."

Hope pauses.

One hand comes out from behind her back.

She taps a finger against her lips.

Her head tilts cutely as she considers this apparent mystery.

Hope Levitt: "Huh. I wonder why? But hey. Its okay! I'm sure they just forgot to mention you. I wouldn't look into it too much."

Bianca stares daggers at Hope.

Hope smiles back.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "I didn't realize UTA signs nepo babies of attempted murders. You tell UTA management or those kids who came to see you that you have a sociopathic gene flowing through your veins from your dumb ass daddy?"

Hope's smile remains.

But there's a brief change behind her eyes.

Hope Levitt: "Oh Bianca. You know, its always fun bumping into you just to see how delusional you've gotten since last time. And UTA knows who my Dad is, but thats not why they hired me. Turns out, they wanted some nice girls to balance out with all the B-words around here. I wonder who they were talking about?"

Hope gives a gentle shrug.

Then grins even wider.

She bounces lightly on her feet.

Bianca's expression tells us she isn't enjoying any part of this reunion.

Hope Levitt: "But hey, I hear you're chasing down the Womens World Title! That sounds like SO much fun. I'm not here for gold though. Some of us still just wrestle to entertain the fans. But it would be pretty schway if you won the World Title. You know why, Bianca?"

Bianca folds her arms.

She rolls her eyes.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "This otta be good. Ok, Hope, I'll bite. Why is that?"

Hope grins.

She steps closer.

Then closer still.

Until she's practically right in Bianca's face.

Hope leans forward slightly.

Her voice stays every bit as cheerful as before.

Hope Levitt: "Because then, when I win the UTA Womens World Title? I'll get to make you miserable as I do it. Yet another time a Levitt has beaten your butt. You'd think we'd get bored with it? But naaaahhhhhh. This is too much fun."

Hope giggles.

Then leans back.

She gives Bianca a cheerful wave.

And skips right past her.

Bianca turns her head as Hope passes.

Hope continues skipping down the hallway as if absolutely nothing happened.

Bianca remains where she is.

Fuming.

Her jaw clenched.

She watches Hope disappear around the corner.

For several seconds...

Bianca doesn't say anything.

Then she slowly turns toward the camera.

The look on her face is enough.

John Phillips: "Well... Hope Levitt has officially arrived in the UTA."

Mark Bravo: "And apparently she already knew exactly which button to push."

John Phillips: "There is clearly history between those two."

Mark Bravo: "History? Bianca looked about three seconds away from turning that hallway into a crime scene."

John Phillips: "Hope Levitt has signed with the UTA, and if that's any indication of what's ahead, Bianca Page may have just found herself a brand-new problem."

Bianca remains where she is.

Fuming.

Her jaw clenched.

She watches Hope disappear around the corner.

For several seconds...

Bianca doesn't say anything.

Then—

Emily Hightower: "Might wanna fix your face."

Bianca's eyes close.

Just for a second.

Because apparently tonight isn't going to stop.

She slowly turns.

Walking toward her from the opposite direction is Emily Hightower.

The UTA Women's Championship rests over one shoulder.

The UTA Hardcore Championship is around her waist.

Emily is in her wrestling gear, wrists taped, making her way toward gorilla position for her upcoming Ring King first-round match against Maxwell Jett.

She looks Bianca up and down.

Then glances toward the hallway where Hope disappeared.

Emily Hightower: "You keep makin' that face, it's liable to stick like that."

Bianca's eyes narrow.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Mind your own business, Emily."

Emily could keep walking.

She should keep walking.

Instead...

She stops.

Emily slowly turns back toward Bianca.

Emily Hightower: "Excuse me?"

Bianca doesn't move.

Emily takes a step toward her.

Emily Hightower: "You know who the hell you're talkin' to?"

Emily steps directly into Bianca's space.

Bianca doesn't give her an inch.

Instead, "Classy" Bianca Page steps forward herself.

Now the two women stand nose-to-nose.

Women's Champion.

Ring King quarterfinalist.

Neither backing down.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Oh, I know exactly who I'm talking to."

Bianca's eyes drop deliberately toward the Women's Championship.

Then back to Emily.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "I've had my eye on you for quite some time."

Emily gives her a humorless grin.

Emily Hightower: "Yeah? Well keep lookin'."

She pats the faceplate of the championship.

Emily Hightower: "'Cause this is as close as you're gettin'."

Bianca smiles.

Not angry anymore.

Smug.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Cute."

She tilts her head.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "But while you've been busy collecting belts, I've been taking care of my business in Ring King."

Bianca leans slightly closer.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "I've already secured my place in the next round."

A beat.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Have you?"

That one hangs there.

Emily's grin disappears.

Bianca knows she got her.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Because maybe you should worry a little less about my face and a little more about Maxwell Jett."

Emily stares at her.

Then slowly nods.

Emily Hightower: "Don't you worry about Maxwell."

Emily steps even closer.

Emily Hightower: "I'll handle him."

Her eyes briefly drop toward Bianca.

Emily Hightower: "And if I keep winnin'..."

She looks Bianca directly in the eyes again.

Emily Hightower: "...maybe I'll get to handle you, too."

Bianca smiles.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Careful what you wish for."

Emily immediately answers.

Emily Hightower: "I don't wish for shit."

A beat.

Emily Hightower: "I earn it."

Emily deliberately shoulders past Bianca.

Bianca turns to watch her go.

Emily doesn't look back.

She continues toward gorilla position.

Toward Maxwell Jett.

Bianca remains in the hallway.

First Hope Levitt.

Now Emily Hightower.

Her irritation has returned.

But there's something else there now.

Interest.

Bianca's eyes remain fixed on the Women's Championship as Emily disappears around the corner.

Slowly...

A smile creeps across Bianca's face.

Maybe this night wasn't quite as irritating as she thought.

The camera cuts back to ringside.

John Phillips: "Well, things just got very interesting backstage."

Mark Bravo: "Bianca Page has already punched her ticket to the next round. Emily Hightower still has Maxwell Jett standing between her and doing the same."

John Phillips: "And judging from that exchange, I don't think Bianca Page has forgotten for one second that Emily Hightower possesses something Bianca has wanted since the day she arrived in UTA."

Mark Bravo: "The Women's Championship."

John Phillips: "But first things first. Emily Hightower has a former UTA Champion waiting for her."

Emily Hightower vs. Maxwell Jett

Match

The camera returns to ringside.

The Cleveland crowd is still buzzing as the Ring King bracket appears briefly on screen.

John Phillips: "And now we return to the Ring King tournament, where another spot in the quarterfinals is about to be decided."

Mark Bravo: "And after what we just saw backstage, John, I'd say one of these two has already had a little more excitement tonight than she planned on."

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower will be here momentarily, but first comes a man who has made absolutely no secret about what winning Ring King would mean to him."

A beat.

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett."

The lights inside Rocket Arena begin to dim.

Immediately—

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

A single white spotlight crashes down onto the entrance stage.

The opening notes of "Gold Standard" hit.

The cocky arena-rock riff gives way to the heavy trap drums.

And out steps—

Maxwell "Max" Jett.

Alone.

No Jacoby Jacobs.

No Darian Darrington.

No First Class.

Just Maxwell.

Dressed in his designer entrance robe, Maxwell stops directly beneath the spotlight.

He looks around Rocket Arena.

The boos continue raining down.

Maxwell slowly closes his eyes.

A smile spreads across his face.

He breathes it in.

Mark Bravo: "Would you look at this guy?"

John Phillips: "For once, Maxwell Jett comes to the ring without the rest of First Class."

Mark Bravo: "Maybe that's because he doesn't think he needs them."

Maxwell opens his eyes.

He looks directly into the hard camera.

Then mouths—

"Keep it coming."

The Cleveland crowd obliges.

BOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

Maxwell grins.

He begins his walk toward the ring.

Slowly.

Painfully slowly.

There isn't the slightest bit of concern on his face.

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett defeated Kairo Bey to qualify for Ring King, and tonight he has an opportunity to move one step closer to what he's wanted since arriving in the United Toughness Alliance."

Mark Bravo: "The UTA Championship."

John Phillips: "Which makes what we heard from First Class earlier tonight all the more interesting."

Maxwell stops halfway down the aisle.

A fan reaches over the barricade and gives him a thumbs-down.

Maxwell stops.

Looks at the thumb.

Looks at the fan.

Then gives him an exaggerated sympathetic expression.

Like he's genuinely sorry the man has to live this way.

Maxwell continues walking.

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. I've been thinking about that."

John Phillips: "Jacoby Jacobs and Darian Darrington were very interested in asking Maxwell about somebody."

Mark Bravo: "Somebody they clearly expected might be here tonight."

Maxwell reaches ringside.

John Phillips: "And Maxwell wouldn't give them an answer."

Maxwell climbs onto the apron.

Mark Bravo: "So I'll ask the question everybody watching is probably asking."

A pause.

Mark Bravo: "Who the hell is him?"

John Phillips: "I don't know."

Mark Bravo: "That wasn't very helpful."

Maxwell wipes his boots carefully on the apron.

John Phillips: "I'm not going to invent an answer just because you asked me a question."

Mark Bravo: "That's never stopped me."

Maxwell suddenly snaps into motion.

He slips through the ropes and immediately climbs onto the second turnbuckle.

The crowd lets him have it.

Maxwell spreads his arms.

He slowly turns his head from one side of Rocket Arena to the other.

Then he points down at himself.

"You're welcome."

More boos.

John Phillips: "Whatever Maxwell Jett and First Class have going on, they're certainly keeping it close to the vest."

Mark Bravo: "And I don't like mysteries when Maxwell Jett is the one smiling about them."

Maxwell hops down.

He unties his robe.

Slowly removes it.

Hands it through the ropes.

Then stretches against the turnbuckles as if he's preparing for a light workout.

John Phillips: "And standing across from Maxwell Jett tonight will be the reigning UTA Women's Champion and Hardcore Champion, Emily Hightower."

Maxwell hears the name.

He stops stretching.

Looks toward the commentary desk.

Then actually laughs.

Mark Bravo: "Oh, come on."

Maxwell shakes his head.

He says something toward the referee.

The camera gets close enough to pick it up.

Maxwell Jett: "Seriously?"

The boos grow louder.

Maxwell points toward the entrance.

Maxwell Jett: "That's my opponent?"

He laughs again.

John Phillips: "There's that famous Maxwell Jett respect for his competition."

Mark Bravo: "Emily Hightower is carrying two championships, John."

Maxwell walks into the center of the ring.

He pantomimes holding two championship belts.

Looks down at his imaginary collection.

Then shakes his head.

Maxwell Jett: "Adorable."

BOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

Mark Bravo: "Keep laughing."

Maxwell retreats into his corner.

He lounges against the turnbuckles.

Arms stretched across the top ropes.

Completely relaxed.

Completely confident.

Waiting.

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett thinks Emily Hightower is a joke."

Mark Bravo: "That's fine."

The lights begin to change.

Maxwell's smile remains.

Mark Bravo: "Something tells me Emily Hightower's about to introduce him to the punchline."

The opening guitar of "The Outsiders" by Eric Church begins to roll through Rocket Arena.

The reaction is immediate.

The crowd rises.

Maxwell Jett does not.

He remains leaned back in his corner.

Arms stretched across the top ropes.

That same smug smile still plastered across his face.

John Phillips: "And here comes the reigning UTA Women's Champion and Hardcore Champion."

Mark Bravo: "The woman Maxwell Jett has spent all night treating like she won those championships at a county fair."

A familiar battered 1978 Chevy pickup rolls into view near the entranceway.

The crowd gets louder.

The truck looks exactly like you'd expect from a Hightower.

Old.

Rugged.

Beaten to hell.

And still running.

It comes to a stop.

The driver's door opens.

Emily Hightower steps out.

The UTA Women's Championship rests over one shoulder.

The UTA Hardcore Championship is secured around her waist.

She takes a long drink from an energy drink.

Then tosses the can back into the cab.

Emily closes the door.

Cracks her neck.

And starts toward the ring.

No smile.

No grand pose.

She looks like somebody just told her the shift started five minutes ago.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower has never cared much for presentation."

Mark Bravo: "Nope. She clocks in, beats the hell out of somebody, clocks out."

Inside the ring, Maxwell slowly pushes himself away from the turnbuckles.

He watches Emily approach.

Then looks toward the referee.

Maxwell raises one hand.

Two fingers.

Points toward Emily's championships.

Then holds his hands apart in exaggerated confusion.

Maxwell Jett: "She needs two?"

The referee ignores him.

Maxwell laughs to himself.

Mark Bravo: "He really doesn't believe she's on his level."

John Phillips: "That's dangerous."

Mark Bravo: "For Emily?"

John Phillips: "For Maxwell."

Emily reaches ringside.

She stops near the timekeeper's area.

First, she removes the Hardcore Championship from around her waist.

She looks down at it.

Then places it carefully beside the timekeeper.

Next comes the Women's Championship.

Emily hands that over as well.

Both championships rest prominently at ringside.

Maxwell watches from inside the ring.

He gives the belts a slow sarcastic clap.

Emily looks up.

Sees him.

Maxwell immediately stops clapping.

Then gives her an exaggerated little wave.

Emily's expression does not change.

She walks toward the ring.

John Phillips: "Maxwell might want to remember something. Emily Hightower is not just carrying two championships."

Mark Bravo: "She's also one of the most physical wrestlers in this company."

Emily climbs onto the apron.

Maxwell walks toward the ropes.

For a moment, it looks like he might hold them open for her.

He even reaches for the top rope.

Emily pauses.

Maxwell gives her an overly polite bow.

Then lets the rope go.

He backs away laughing.

Mark Bravo: "Oh, he's asking for it."

Emily steps through the ropes herself.

Maxwell retreats into the opposite corner.

Emily walks toward the center of the ring.

Maxwell looks her up and down.

Then at the championships outside.

Then back at Emily.

He mouths something.

The camera catches it.

Maxwell Jett: "Cute belts."

Emily stops.

Turns toward him.

Maxwell smiles.

Emily Hightower: "You keep talkin'."

Maxwell gestures toward himself.

Maxwell Jett: "Former UTA Champion."

He points toward Emily.

Maxwell Jett: "You."

Then he gestures broadly toward her two championships at ringside.

Maxwell Jett: "Whatever all that is."

The crowd boos.

Emily stares at him.

Then slowly smiles.

Not because she finds him funny.

Because now she knows exactly what kind of night this is going to be.

Mark Bravo: "That smile right there worries me."

John Phillips: "It should worry Maxwell."

Emily rolls her shoulders.

Then cracks her knuckles.

Maxwell watches.

Still smiling.

Still completely unconcerned.

The referee calls both competitors toward the center of the ring.

Emily comes forward immediately.

Maxwell takes his time.

He walks toward her like somebody reporting for an appointment he expects to end early.

They meet in the center.

Emily stares directly into Maxwell's eyes.

Maxwell looks down at her.

Then toward the camera.

He smirks.

Maxwell Jett: "This is gonna be quick."

Emily hears him.

Emily Hightower: "Hope so."

A beat.

Emily Hightower: "I got shit to do."

The crowd erupts.

Maxwell's smile tightens ever so slightly.

The referee backs both competitors away.

Emily heads toward her corner.

Maxwell does the same.

He turns toward the crowd one last time.

Points at Emily.

Then gestures as though wiping his hands clean.

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett thinks this is going to be easy."

Mark Bravo: "Emily Hightower looks like she hopes he keeps thinking that."

Emily lowers herself into a ready stance.

Maxwell remains upright.

Loose.

Smirking.

The referee looks toward Emily.

Then Maxwell.

Both are ready.

The referee signals.

DING! DING! DING!

The bell rings.

Emily Hightower steps immediately toward the center of the ring.

Maxwell Jett...

Doesn't.

He remains in his corner.

One arm draped casually over the top rope.

Emily stops.

Maxwell holds up one finger.

Wait.

He finishes stretching his neck.

Rolls one shoulder.

Then the other.

Finally, Maxwell steps out of the corner.

Mark Bravo: "Oh, this is gonna get old real fast."

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett said earlier tonight that Emily Hightower was a joke opponent. He's certainly treating her like one."

Maxwell approaches.

Emily raises her hands.

Ready to lock up.

Maxwell reaches forward—

Then stops.

He looks at Emily's hand.

Looks at the crowd.

And laughs.

Maxwell backs away.

Emily's jaw tightens.

Maxwell Jett: "Relax."

He gestures downward with both hands.

Maxwell Jett: "This isn't one of your little hardcore matches."

The crowd boos.

Emily nods.

Emily Hightower: "Come find out."

Maxwell smirks.

This time they meet.

Collar-and-elbow.

Maxwell immediately uses his size to shove Emily backward.

She slides several feet across the canvas.

Maxwell releases.

Then looks around the arena.

He spreads his arms.

Maxwell Jett: "See?"

BOOOOOOOOO!

Mark Bravo: "He won one lockup."

John Phillips: "You'd think he just won Ring King."

Emily gets back to her feet.

No anger.

Yet.

She motions for Maxwell to try it again.

Maxwell happily obliges.

Another collar-and-elbow.

Maxwell pushes.

This time Emily plants her boots.

Maxwell pushes harder.

Emily doesn't move.

His expression changes slightly.

Emily suddenly drives forward!

Maxwell goes backward!
All the way into the corner!
The crowd pops!
Emily presses him against the turnbuckles until the referee calls for the break.
She releases immediately.
Hands up.
Clean break.
Maxwell looks at her.
Emily gives him a little smile.
Emily Hightower: "See?"
The crowd laughs.
Maxwell's smile disappears.
Mark Bravo: "HA!"
John Phillips: "Maxwell may have walked into that one."
Emily backs toward the center.
Maxwell straightens himself.
He steps out of the corner.
They circle.
Lock up again.
Maxwell quickly transitions into a side headlock.
He cranks down.
Then looks directly toward the hard camera.
Smiles.
He runs one hand through his hair.
Maxwell Jett: "Wrestling."
Emily plants a hand against his back.
Maxwell continues mugging for the camera.
Emily wraps both arms around his waist.
Maxwell's smile fades.
Emily lifts—
BACKDROP SUPLEX!
Maxwell crashes across the canvas!
The crowd erupts!

Maxwell rolls immediately to the floor.

He lands on his feet beside the apron.

His eyes wide.

Emily sits up inside the ring.

She looks down at him.

Emily Hightower: "Wrestling."

Another roar from Cleveland.

Mark Bravo: "Maybe stop teaching the class, professor."

Maxwell walks away from the ring.

Hands on his hips.

He looks genuinely offended.

The referee begins counting.

ONE!

Maxwell points toward Emily.

Maxwell Jett: "Hair."

Emily looks at the referee.

Then at Maxwell.

She grabs her own hair and holds it up.

Emily Hightower: "Didn't touch it."

TWO!

John Phillips: "There was absolutely no hair involved."

Mark Bravo: "Maxwell knows that. He's just trying to explain to himself why he's standing on the floor."

THREE!

Maxwell takes his time.

He walks around the ring.

Emily gestures for him to come back.

FOUR!

Maxwell reaches the apron.

Then stops.

He notices Emily's championships beside the timekeeper.

He points at them.

Then toward Emily.

Maxwell Jett: "You want those back after this?"

Emily takes a step toward the ropes.

Emily Hightower: "Get in here and I'll show ya where you can put 'em."

Mark Bravo: "There's an offer."

Maxwell climbs onto the apron.

Emily approaches.

Maxwell immediately tells the referee to back her up.

Maxwell Jett: "Get her back!"

The referee reluctantly moves Emily toward the center.

Maxwell carefully steps through.

He adjusts his trunks.

Checks his hair.

Then finally turns around—

Emily charges!

Maxwell's eyes go wide!

He dives sideways!

Emily stops herself before hitting the corner.

Maxwell scrambles up.

Emily turns.

Maxwell raises both hands.

Maxwell Jett: "Whoa! Whoa! Whoa!"

Emily keeps coming.

Maxwell ducks between the ropes.

The referee steps between them.

John Phillips: "Maxwell wants no part of Emily when she's coming straight at him."

Mark Bravo: "Because he's starting to figure something out. Emily doesn't care that he used to be UTA Champion."

The referee backs Emily away.

Maxwell slowly steps back through the ropes.

He points toward his head.

Maxwell Jett: "Brains."

Emily rolls her eyes.

They circle again.

Maxwell offers a test of strength.

One hand raised.

Emily looks at it.

Then raises hers.

Maxwell pulls his hand away before they connect.

He slicks his hair back.

The crowd boos.

Emily shakes her head.

Maxwell offers it again.

Emily reaches.

Again he pulls away.

Maxwell Jett: "Too slow."

Emily stares at him.

Maxwell laughs.

He offers his hand a third time.

Emily reaches—

Maxwell tries to pull away—

Emily catches his wrist!

Maxwell's eyes widen.

Emily yanks him forward!

SHORT-ARM CLOTHESLINE!

Maxwell flips inside out!

The crowd explodes!

Mark Bravo: "TOO SLOW, HUH?!"

Maxwell hits the mat hard.

Emily doesn't let him escape this time.

She grabs him by the head.

Pulls him upright.

Forearm!

Another!

Another!

Maxwell staggers backward into the ropes.

Emily whips him across.

Maxwell rebounds—

Emily catches him with a massive shoulder block!

Maxwell goes down!

Emily hits the ropes.

Maxwell rolls onto his stomach.

Emily jumps over him.

She hits the opposite ropes.

Maxwell gets up—

Emily launches herself with a flying shoulder tackle!

Maxwell crashes down again!

Cover!

ONE!

TWO!

Maxwell kicks out!

Emily immediately grabs his arm.

Maxwell rolls toward the ropes.

Emily tries to pull him back.

Maxwell hooks the bottom rope with both arms.

Maxwell Jett: "BREAK!"

The referee calls for it.

Emily releases.

Maxwell rolls outside again.

But this time...

There is no smile.

He walks several steps away from the ring.

Turns around.

Looks at Emily.

Really looks at her.

Emily stands in the center of the ring.

Motioning for him to come back.

John Phillips: "There it is."

Mark Bravo: "Yep."

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett isn't laughing anymore."

Mark Bravo: "Because the joke just knocked him on his ass."

Maxwell rubs his jaw.

His eyes narrow.

The arrogance isn't gone.

But now there's calculation behind it.

Maxwell climbs back onto the apron.

This time he doesn't stall.

He enters.

Emily comes forward.

Maxwell immediately drives a knee into her stomach!

Emily doubles over.

Maxwell clubs her across the back.

Again!

He grabs her by the head and drives her face-first into the turnbuckle!

Emily stumbles.

Maxwell grabs the arm.

Irish whip!

Emily hits the opposite corner hard.

Maxwell charges—

Emily gets a boot up!

Maxwell staggers!

Emily comes out of the corner—

Maxwell catches her with a thumb to the eye!

The referee was screened by Emily's body!

John Phillips: "Come on!"

Emily grabs at her eye.

Maxwell immediately hooks her.

SNAP SUPLEX!

Emily hits hard.

Maxwell floats into the cover.

ONE!

TWO!

Emily kicks out.

Maxwell sits up.

He looks down at her.

Then toward the referee.

Two fingers.

The referee confirms it.

Maxwell nods.

No complaint.

No tantrum.

He's working now.

Mark Bravo: "Notice the difference."

John Phillips: "Absolutely. Maxwell Jett has stopped performing."

Maxwell pulls Emily upright.

He drives a forearm into her jaw.

Emily fires one back!

Maxwell answers!

Emily!

Maxwell!

Emily!

Emily!

Emily!

Maxwell staggers!

Emily grabs him—

Maxwell suddenly drops and yanks her forward!

Emily goes throat-first across the middle rope!

Maxwell springs up.

He drives both knees into her back!

Emily snaps backward onto the canvas!

Maxwell covers!

ONE!

TWO!

Emily kicks out!

Maxwell immediately grabs a handful of hair and pulls her up.

The referee warns him.

Maxwell releases before five.

Maxwell Jett: "I know the rules."

He hooks Emily's head.
Neckbreaker!
Another cover.
ONE!
TWO!
Emily gets the shoulder up!
Maxwell exhales.
Now he looks annoyed.
He grabs Emily by the wrist.
Pulls her up.
Emily suddenly explodes forward!
Headbutt!
Maxwell stumbles backward!
Emily grabs him around the waist.
BELLY-TO-BELLY SUPLEX!
Maxwell flies across the ring!
Both competitors are down!
The crowd comes alive again.
John Phillips: "Emily Hightower isn't going away!"
Mark Bravo: "Maxwell knows that now!"
Emily pushes herself onto one knee.
Maxwell uses the ropes to pull himself upright.
Emily rises.
Maxwell turns—
Emily charges!
Running clothesline!
Maxwell goes down!
Back up!
Another clothesline!
Maxwell hits the canvas again!
Emily grabs him.
Whips him into the corner!
She follows—

RUNNING SPLASH!

Maxwell gets crushed against the turnbuckles!

Emily pulls him out.

Hooks him.

Maxwell realizes what's coming.

He fights desperately.

Emily tries to lift.

Maxwell blocks.

Emily tries again.

Maxwell throws an elbow!

Emily absorbs it!

Another!

She releases.

Maxwell stumbles away.

Emily comes after him—

Maxwell catches her with a kick!

Emily answers with a forearm!

Maxwell fires one back!

The two begin trading again in the center of the ring.

Neither giving ground.

The Cleveland crowd gets louder with every shot.

John Phillips: "This has become a fight!"

Mark Bravo: "And remember how this started! Maxwell thought he was gonna play with her!"

Emily lands another forearm!

Maxwell responds with one of his own!

Emily rocks him!

Maxwell stumbles into the ropes.

Emily charges—

Maxwell lowers his shoulder and sends her over the top!

Emily lands on the apron!

Maxwell doesn't realize it.

He turns away.

Emily grabs the top rope.

She starts to pull herself back into the ring—

And suddenly...

The crowd begins to react.

Not to the match.

To the entranceway.

John Phillips: "Now what?"

Maxwell looks toward the ramp.

Emily does the same.

The camera turns.

Walking down the aisle...

"Classy" Bianca Page.

Emily's expression changes instantly.

Mark Bravo: "Oh, come on!"

Bianca isn't rushing.

She isn't threatening anyone.

She simply strolls toward ringside with a satisfied smile.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page has already secured her place in the next round of Ring King, and after what happened between these two backstage earlier tonight, I don't like this one bit."

Bianca reaches ringside.

Emily steps fully back into the ring.

Her eyes never leave Bianca.

Maxwell looks from Emily...

To Bianca...

Then back to Emily.

He smiles.

Bianca walks around the ring.

Right toward the timekeeper.

Right toward Emily's championships.

Emily immediately steps toward the ropes.

Emily Hightower: "Don't you fucking touch 'em."

Bianca stops.

Looks at Emily.

Then looks down at the UTA Women's Championship and UTA Hardcore Championship.

Her smile grows.

John Phillips: "Bianca, don't."

Bianca reaches down.

Her fingers slowly brush across the faceplate of the Women's Championship.

Emily immediately tries to step through the ropes.

But Maxwell grabs her around the waist!

Emily fights forward!

Maxwell digs his heels into the canvas and pulls her backward!

Emily Hightower: "LET GO OF ME!"

Maxwell laughs.

Maxwell Jett: "We have a match!"

Mark Bravo: "Oh, NOW he cares about the match!"

Emily throws an elbow backward!

Maxwell ducks it.

He keeps her trapped.

Outside...

Bianca lifts the Women's Championship from the table.

Emily's eyes go wide with fury.

John Phillips: "Bianca Page has Emily Hightower's championship!"

Bianca looks down at the gold.

Then toward her own reflection in the faceplate.

She smiles.

Inside the ring...

Emily is absolutely losing her mind.

Bianca Page holds the UTA Women's Championship in both hands.

She studies it.

Turns it slightly.

Lets the arena lights catch the gold.

Then Bianca looks toward Emily.

And smiles.

Emily Hightower: "PUT THAT DOWN!"

Emily surges toward the ropes again.

Maxwell immediately grabs her from behind.

Emily fights against him.

Maxwell plants his feet.

Maxwell Jett: "Hey! Hey! Focus!"

Emily throws an elbow backward!

Maxwell avoids it!

He pulls her back toward the center of the ring.

Mark Bravo: "This is unbelievable! Maxwell spent the first half of this match treating Emily like she didn't belong in the same ring with him, and now he's begging her to pay attention to him!"

John Phillips: "Because Maxwell learned the hard way that Emily Hightower absolutely belongs in there. Bianca Page may have just handed him exactly the distraction he needed."

Bianca looks around.

Then notices the empty chair beside the timekeeper.

Her eyes light up.

Bianca steps onto the chair.

The timekeeper looks completely unsure what to do.

Bianca raises the UTA Women's Championship high above her head.

She slowly turns toward one side of Rocket Arena.

The crowd responds with a thunderous chorus of boos.

Bianca nods thoughtfully.

As though taking their opinion under serious consideration.

She turns toward the other side.

Raises the championship again.

More boos.

Mark Bravo: "What's she doing, taking a survey?"

John Phillips: "I think Bianca Page is trying on Emily's future in her head."

Bianca lowers the Women's Championship.

She drapes it over her shoulder.

Poses.

Looks down at herself.

Not quite satisfied.

Then her eyes find the other championship.

Bianca reaches down.

She picks up the UTA Hardcore Championship.

Emily Hightower: "BIANCA!"

Bianca raises the Hardcore Championship.

She looks at the crowd.

Then at the Women's Championship.

Then the Hardcore Championship.

Bianca holds the Women's Championship above her head.

Boos.

She lowers it.

Raises the Hardcore Championship.

More boos.

Bianca makes a face.

Apparently that hasn't helped.

Mark Bravo: "I don't think Cleveland likes either option."

John Phillips: "Those aren't options! Neither championship belongs to her!"

Bianca shrugs.

Then drapes one championship over each shoulder.

She strikes a pose atop the chair.

A broad smile stretches across her face.

That one works.

Bianca nods approvingly.

Both.

Inside the ring, Emily has seen enough.

She drives her heel down onto Maxwell's foot!

Maxwell releases her!

Emily spins around—

FOREARM!

Maxwell staggers!

Another!

Another!

Maxwell is driven backward!

Emily turns immediately toward Bianca.

She heads for the ropes.

Emily Hightower: "GET YOUR ASS DOWN FROM THERE!"

Bianca waves.

Emily starts through the ropes—

Maxwell grabs her ankle!

Emily falls forward onto the canvas!

Mark Bravo: "Maxwell won't let her go!"

Emily kicks backward!

Maxwell takes the boot across the shoulder!

He releases!

Emily gets back up.

She turns—

Maxwell charges!

Emily ducks!

Maxwell hits the ropes!

Rebounds—

Emily catches him!

SPINEBUSTER!

The ring shakes!

The crowd erupts!

Emily hooks the leg!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

MAXWELL GETS THE SHOULDER UP!

John Phillips: "So close!"

Emily sits up.

She looks toward the referee.

Then immediately toward Bianca.

Bianca is still standing on the chair.

Still wearing both championships.

Emily's face turns red.

Mark Bravo: "Emily, forget her!"

Emily gets up.

She points directly at Bianca.

Emily Hightower: "YOU'RE DEAD!"

Bianca places a hand against her chest.

Mock offense.

Maxwell comes from behind!

Roll-up!

ONE!

TWO!

Emily kicks out!

Both competitors shoot to their feet!

Maxwell swings!

Emily blocks!

She unloads with a right hand!

Another!

Another!

Maxwell staggers backward!

Emily grabs his wrist.

Irish whip!

Maxwell reverses!

Emily hits the ropes!

She comes back—

Maxwell drops down!

Emily hurdles him!

She hits the opposite ropes!

Maxwell gets up—

BIG BOOT!

Emily catches him directly in the face!

Maxwell drops!

Emily covers!

ONE!

TWO!

MAXWELL KICKS OUT!

Emily doesn't waste time.

She grabs Maxwell by the head and pulls him upright.

She hooks him.

Maxwell immediately realizes the danger.

He fights her grip.
Emily muscles him upward—
Maxwell slips free!
He lands behind her!
Emily turns—
Maxwell catches her with a kick to the stomach!
He hooks her!
Emily blocks!
Maxwell tries again!
Emily powers out!
She sends Maxwell stumbling toward the ropes!
Emily charges after him!
Maxwell catches the top rope and pulls it down!
Emily stops herself just before spilling to the floor!
She turns—
Maxwell charges!
Emily sidesteps!
Maxwell nearly goes through the ropes himself!
He catches himself.
Emily grabs him from behind!
Maxwell desperately hooks the top rope!
The referee steps in.
John Phillips: "Emily trying to pull Maxwell away from those ropes!"
The referee calls for the break.
Emily reluctantly releases.
Maxwell immediately throws himself through the ropes onto the apron.
He takes a breath.
Emily reaches for him.
Maxwell drops to the floor!
Mark Bravo: "And there he goes again!"
Emily marches toward the ropes.
Maxwell backs away.
He holds up both hands.

Maxwell Jett: "Stay there."

Emily steps through the ropes.

The referee grabs her arm.

John Phillips: "The referee trying to keep Emily inside!"

Maxwell sees his opportunity.

He slides underneath the bottom rope behind her.

Emily pulls free from the referee.

She turns—

Maxwell drives a knee into her midsection!

He grabs her.

Whips her toward the ropes!

Emily reverses!

Maxwell hits the ropes!

Comes back—

Emily swings with a clothesline!

Maxwell ducks!

Emily continues toward the opposite ropes.

The ropes directly in front of the timekeeper's area.

Directly in front of Bianca Page.

Bianca's eyes widen.

Then narrow.

A smile.

John Phillips: "Emily coming off the ropes—"

Bianca quickly slips the Hardcore Championship from her shoulder.

The referee's attention is on Maxwell.

Emily hits the ropes—

CRACK!

BIANCA DRIVES THE CHAMPIONSHIP DIRECTLY INTO EMILY'S FACE!

Emily's head snaps backward!

The crowd ERUPTS in boos!

John Phillips: "BIANCA PAGE JUST HIT EMILY WITH HER OWN CHAMPIONSHIP!"

Mark Bravo: "THE REFEREE DIDN'T SEE IT!"

Emily staggers away from the ropes.

Her legs wobble.

Maxwell is waiting.

For just a fraction of a second...

Even Maxwell looks surprised.

His eyes dart toward Bianca.

Bianca simply smiles back.

Maxwell looks at Emily.

Then shrugs.

Mark Bravo: "Don't you dare."

Maxwell's surprise becomes a grin.

John Phillips: "Maxwell knows exactly what just happened!"

Emily turns toward him.

Still dazed.

Maxwell grabs her!

Hooks both arms!

PLATINUM DRIVER!

Emily is driven into the canvas!

Maxwell rolls her over!

He hooks the leg!

The referee drops!

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

DING! DING! DING!

The boos become deafening.

Maxwell immediately releases the leg.

He rolls onto his back.

For a moment, he stares toward the ceiling.

Then he starts laughing.

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett advances, but Bianca Page just handed him this match!"

Mark Bravo: "And he doesn't give a damn!"

Maxwell sits up.

The referee raises his arm.

Maxwell points toward himself with his free hand.

Maxwell Jett: "Told you."

BOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

Maxwell laughs harder.

John Phillips: "He didn't plan that! Look at his face when Bianca hit Emily. Maxwell Jett was just as surprised as anybody!"

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, surprised for about half a second. Then he remembered he's Maxwell Jett and decided he'd happily cash the check."

Outside the ring, Bianca looks down at the Hardcore Championship in her hands.

She admires it.

Then places it back on the timekeeper's table.

Almost delicately.

Next comes the Women's Championship.

Bianca pauses with it.

She looks at Emily.

Then at the championship.

She holds it against her waist.

Just for a moment.

Imagining it.

Then Bianca lays it beside the Hardcore Championship.

Mark Bravo: "That's what this was about."

John Phillips: "Bianca Page made her intentions toward Emily Hightower very clear earlier tonight. She just made them even clearer."

Bianca backs away from the timekeeper's area.

Inside the ring, Emily begins to move.

Her hand immediately goes to her face.

Maxwell notices.

He looks toward Bianca.

Bianca looks back.

For a moment...

Neither says anything.

Maxwell points toward her.

Then gives her a sarcastic little tip of an imaginary hat.

Bianca rolls her eyes.

She turns and starts back up the aisle.

John Phillips: "And let's be clear: Bianca Page didn't do that to help Maxwell Jett."

Mark Bravo: "Not a chance. Maxwell was just the lucky bastard standing in the right place."

Emily finally realizes what happened.

She looks toward the timekeeper.

Her championships.

Then toward the aisle.

Bianca.

Emily's expression twists with rage.

She rolls toward the ropes.

Emily Hightower: "BIANCA!"

Bianca hears her.

She stops halfway up the aisle.

Turns.

Emily is on her knees inside the ring.

Furious.

Bianca smiles.

Then gives Emily a little wave.

The exact same kind of cheerful wave Hope Levitt gave Bianca earlier tonight.

Bianca turns and continues toward the curtain.

Mark Bravo: "Oh, that was nasty."

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower's Ring King tournament is over because of Bianca Page."

Maxwell climbs onto the second turnbuckle.

He raises both arms.

The boos rain down.

He couldn't care less how he got here.

He got here.

John Phillips: "And with that victory, Maxwell Jett is moving on to Round Two."

Mark Bravo: "Which means whatever Maxwell Jett and First Class have planned... whatever that conversation about him was earlier tonight... it's still alive."

Maxwell looks directly into the hard camera.

That familiar smug smile returns.

He mouths two words.

"One closer."

A tournament graphic fills the screen.

RING KING — ADVANCING TO ROUND TWO

MAXWELL JETT

Inspiring Speech

Segment

The broadcast cuts backstage.

Inside The Empire locker room.

Marie Van Claudio is already dressed for competition.

She stands near the center of the room, rolling one shoulder and adjusting the tape around her wrist.

Around her...

The Empire.

Amy Harrison.

Valkyrie Knoxx.

Trey Mack.

Clovis Black.

All gathered around as Marie prepares for her Ring King first-round match against Maxx Mayhem.

Marie finishes with the tape.

She looks around the room.

Marie Van Claudio: "This is exactly what we talked about."

Everyone turns their attention toward her.

Marie Van Claudio: "We had one opportunity to make sure The Empire had somebody in this tournament."

Amy gives a small nod.

Amy Harrison: "And we did."

Marie Van Claudio: "No."

Marie smiles.

Marie Van Claudio: "I did."

Amy's expression tightens slightly.

Trey immediately sees it.

Trey Mack: "And that's good!"

He claps his hands together once.

Trey Mack: "That's what matters."

Clovis gives Trey a sideways glance.

Trey shrugs.

Not tonight.

Marie continues.

Marie Van Claudio: "Tonight is not about Amy."

Amy folds her arms.

Marie Van Claudio: "It is not about what happened between us."

Marie Van Claudio: "It is not about who leads The Empire."

A beat.

Marie Van Claudio: "Tonight is about making sure everybody understands that when this tournament ends..."

Marie points toward herself.

Marie Van Claudio: "...they will not be calling me Ring King."

A smile.

Marie Van Claudio: "They will be calling me the Ring Queen."

Trey nods enthusiastically.

Trey Mack: "There you go."

Amy gives an approving smirk.

Even Valkyrie offers a slow nod.

Clovis remains silent.

Which, for Clovis, is practically a standing ovation.

Marie Van Claudio: "And Maxx Mayhem?"

Marie scoffs.

Marie Van Claudio: "Please."

Marie Van Claudio: "Maxx Mayhem is not standing between me and anything."

Amy Harrison: "Exactly."

Marie Van Claudio: "He wants to run around hitting people with garbage cans?"

A shrug.

Marie Van Claudio: "Fine."

Marie Van Claudio: "He wants to scream and throw things and turn every room he enters into a circus?"

Another shrug.

Marie Van Claudio: "Let him."

Marie Van Claudio: "Because when that bell rings, he is stepping into the ring with the First Lady of the UTA."

Valkyrie Knoxx: "And he will be broken."

Marie smiles toward Valkyrie.

Marie Van Claudio: "Exactly."

She starts pacing slowly.

Marie Van Claudio: "Maxx Mayhem can bring all the chaos he wants."

Marie Van Claudio: "Chaos does not win tournaments."

Amy Harrison: "Power does."

Marie Van Claudio: "Experience does."

Trey Mack: "Winning does."

Marie Van Claudio: "And tonight—"

???: "Yeah! You get him!"

Marie nods.

Marie Van Claudio: "Exactly!"

A beat.

Everyone freezes.

Marie slowly looks toward Trey.

Trey looks toward Amy.

Amy looks toward Valkyrie.

Valkyrie looks toward Clovis.

Clovis looks toward...

Someone standing behind all of them.

The camera slowly pans back.

There, wedged comfortably between a locker and a stack of equipment bags...

...is Maxx Mayhem.

Maxx gives everyone a big thumbs-up.

Maxx Mayhem: "Hell of a speech."

Silence.

Marie blinks.

Once.

Twice.

Marie Van Claudio: "WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING IN HERE?!"

Maxx looks around.

Maxx Mayhem: "Listening."

He nods toward Marie.

Maxx Mayhem: "Real inspiring stuff."

A beat.

Maxx Mayhem: "Real good for a skirt."

The entire room changes.

Marie's mouth drops open.

Amy's eyes widen.

Trey immediately puts a hand over his mouth.

Not because he's offended.

Because he's trying desperately not to laugh at what is about to happen.

Valkyrie's expression goes completely cold.

Clovis slowly turns his entire body toward Maxx.

Maxx Mayhem: "What?"

He looks around the room.

Maxx Mayhem: "That was a compliment."

Amy Harrison: "How did you even get in here?!"

Maxx points toward the door.

Maxx Mayhem: "Door."

Amy stares at him.

Maxx Mayhem: "Pretty standard technology."

Trey loses the battle.

A laugh escapes.

Everyone turns toward him.

Trey immediately clears his throat.

Trey Mack: "That wasn't funny."

Maxx points at him.

Maxx Mayhem: "Thank you."

Trey Mack: "I didn't—"

Marie Van Claudio: "GET HIM OUT!"

Maxx holds both hands up.

Maxx Mayhem: "Whoa, whoa, whoa."

He looks toward Marie.

Maxx Mayhem: "I just wanted to tell you I support your whole queen thing."

Marie stares daggers at him.

Maxx Mayhem: "King."

He waves one hand dismissively.

Maxx Mayhem: "Queen."

Maxx Mayhem: "Duke."

Maxx Mayhem: "Regional Assistant Viscount."

Maxx shrugs.

Maxx Mayhem: "Whatever makes you happy."

Marie Van Claudio: "Maxx."

Maxx Mayhem: "Marie."

Marie Van Claudio: "Get."

A beat.

Marie Van Claudio: "Out."

Maxx thinks about it.

Maxx Mayhem: "Counterpoint."

He points toward himself.

Maxx Mayhem: "No."

Clovis steps forward.

Maxx looks up at him.

And up.

Maxx's smile fades just slightly.

Maxx Mayhem: "Strong counter-counterpoint."

Trey steps up beside Clovis.

Trey Mack: "Come on, man."

Maxx Mayhem: "You're kicking me out?"

Trey Mack: "Yep."

Maxx Mayhem: "After I supported the speech?"

Trey Mack: "Yep."

Maxx Mayhem: "This is why factions don't work."

Trey grabs one arm.

Clovis grabs the other.

Maxx immediately goes completely limp.

Maxx Mayhem: "I HAVE NO BONES!"

Trey sighs.

Trey Mack: "Why are you like this?"

Clovis says nothing.

He simply starts moving toward the door.

Which means Maxx is moving toward the door whether Maxx agrees with the concept or not.

His boots drag across the floor.

Maxx Mayhem: "WAIT!"

Marie folds her arms.

Maxx Mayhem: "One more thing!"

Marie Van Claudio: "No."

Maxx Mayhem: "Great speech!"

Marie Van Claudio: "OUT!"

Trey opens the door.

Clovis and Trey shove Maxx through it.

Maxx stumbles into the hallway.

He catches himself.

Then immediately sticks his head back through the doorway.

Maxx Mayhem: "RING QUEEN!"

Marie grabs the nearest water bottle and throws it.

Maxx ducks.

The bottle explodes against the hallway wall.

Maxx Mayhem: "YEAH!"

Clovis slams the door shut.

Silence.

Everyone in The Empire stares at the door.

A beat.

Another.

Then Maxx's muffled voice comes from the other side.

Maxx Mayhem: "YOUR SPEECH WAS BETTER THAN AMY'S!"

Amy's head snaps toward Marie.

Marie immediately points at the door.

Marie Van Claudio: "Do not."

Amy raises both hands.

Amy Harrison: "I didn't say anything."

Marie Van Claudio: "Your face did."

Trey bites the inside of his cheek.

Hard.

Marie catches him.

Marie Van Claudio: "Trey."

Trey Mack: "I'm good."

Clovis returns to his spot.

Valkyrie looks toward the door.

Valkyrie Knoxx: "I could break him now."

Marie exhales.

Marie Van Claudio: "No."

She grabs her entrance jacket.

Marie Van Claudio: "He's mine."

A beat.

Marie looks toward the door.

A smile slowly begins to form.

Marie Van Claudio: "And now I'm going to enjoy this even more."

Marie heads toward the exit.

The rest of The Empire begins to follow.

Trey opens the door carefully.

He looks left.

Then right.

No Maxx.

Trey Mack: "We're clear."

Everyone starts out.

Clovis is the last one through.

He pauses.

Looks down.

Taped to the outside of the door is a handwritten piece of paper.

GOOD LUCK, SKIRT!

Clovis tears it down.

He crumples it in one massive fist.

The camera cuts away.

September Twenty-Sixth

Segment

The broadcast cuts backstage.

Near gorilla position.

The atmosphere here is considerably more focused than most of what we've seen backstage tonight.

Production crew hurry past.

Monitors display the live feed from inside Rocket Arena.

And sitting on a large equipment case is the man scheduled to compete later tonight in the final first-round match of Ring King.

"Beautiful" Bobby Dean.

The UTA International Championship rests across his lap.

Bobby is already dressed for competition.

He's staring down at the championship.

Quietly.

Not polishing it.

Not talking to it.

Not eating anything.

Just thinking.

His fingers trace the edge of the center plate.

Then—

Eric Dane Jr.: "Wow."

Bobby closes his eyes.

He knows the voice.

Eric Dane Jr. walks into frame.

Expensive jacket.

Tinted sunglasses.

The swagger of someone who believes the camera crew should be thanking him for appearing.

Eric looks down at Bobby.

Then at the International Championship.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Look at you."

Bobby looks up.

Bobby Dean: "Hi, Eric."

Eric Dane Jr.: "No scooter."

Eric looks around.

Eric Dane Jr.: "No donut."

He gestures toward Bobby's gear.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You're even dressed like a wrestler."

A beat.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I'm proud of you."

Bobby stares at him.

Bobby Dean: "Thanks."

Eric's smile falters slightly.

That wasn't the reaction he wanted.

Eric Dane Jr.: "That wasn't a compliment."

Bobby Dean: "Oh."

A beat.

Bobby Dean: "Then I take it back."

Eric removes his sunglasses.

Slowly.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Cute."

He steps closer.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Big night tonight, Bobby."

Bobby nods.

Bobby Dean: "Yep."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Mike Best."

Bobby nods again.

Bobby Dean: "Yep."

Eric Dane Jr.: "First time you've ever wrestled him in UTA."

Bobby Dean: "Yep."

Eric waits.

Bobby doesn't add anything.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Do you have anything besides 'yep'?"

Bobby thinks.

Bobby Dean: "Probably."

Eric exhales through his nose.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Here's what I don't understand."

He crouches slightly so he's closer to Bobby's eye level.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Why are you doing this?"

Bobby looks confused.

Bobby Dean: "Doing what?"

Eric gestures toward the arena.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Ring King."

Eric Dane Jr.: "This whole thing."

Eric points at Bobby.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You've already got a match September twenty-sixth."

Now he points toward the International Championship.

Eric Dane Jr.: "With me."

Eric grins.

Eric Dane Jr.: "So let's pretend for one insane second that you actually beat Mike Best tonight."

Bobby's eyes narrow just slightly.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Then you win again."

Eric raises another finger.

Eric Dane Jr.: "And again."

Another.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Congratulations."

He gives Bobby a sarcastic little clap.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Beautiful Bobby Dean becomes the 2026 Ring King."

Eric leans closer.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Know what that means?"

Bobby looks at him.

Bobby Dean: "I get the crown?"

Eric pauses.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I—"

He stops himself.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Probably."

Bobby nods approvingly.

Bobby Dean: "Nice."

Eric Dane Jr.: "That's not the point!"

Eric straightens up.

Eric Dane Jr.: "The point is you'd go into Ring King with an International Championship defense against me..."

He raises one finger.

Eric Dane Jr.: "...and whatever obligations come with winning this tournament."

Another finger.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Potentially two matches."

Eric smiles.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You."

He looks Bobby up and down.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Two matches."

Eric starts laughing.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Bobby, cardio hasn't exactly been one of your defining characteristics."

Bobby looks down at his stomach.

Then back up.

Bobby Dean: "That's fair."

Eric laughs harder.

Eric Dane Jr.: "See? Even you know it."

Bobby looks back down at the International Championship.

Bobby Dean: "But if I gotta wrestle twice..."

Eric's laughter begins to fade.

Bobby lifts the championship from his lap.

Places it over his shoulder.

Bobby Dean: "...then I wrestle twice."

Eric stares at him.

Bobby stands.

Bobby Dean: "I didn't think I could win this."

He taps the International Championship.

Bobby Dean: "Then I did."

A beat.

Bobby Dean: "I didn't think I could defend it."

Another.

Bobby Dean: "Then I did."

Eric immediately interrupts.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You lost to Lindsey."

Bobby nods.

Bobby Dean: "By disqualification."

Eric's jaw tightens.

Bobby Dean: "Because somebody came out and stuck his nose where it didn't belong."

That lands.

Eric steps closer.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I saved your championship."

Bobby shakes his head.

Bobby Dean: "I didn't ask you to."

Silence.

The difference between this Bobby Dean and the man Eric was pushing around months ago is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore.

Bobby Dean: "You keep saying I don't deserve this."

He lifts the International Championship slightly.

Bobby Dean: "Okay."

Bobby gives a small shrug.

Bobby Dean: "September twenty-sixth."

Bobby Dean: "Take it."

Eric smiles.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Oh, I will."

Bobby Dean: "Maybe."

The smile disappears.

Eric stares at Bobby.

Bobby looks almost surprised that the word came out of his own mouth.

But he doesn't take it back.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Maybe?"

Bobby nods.

Bobby Dean: "Maybe."

Eric gets directly in Bobby's face.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Don't confuse holding that championship with becoming somebody."

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

A beat.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You're still the joke."

Bobby doesn't look away.

Eric Dane Jr.: "And at Ring King, I'm finally taking the punchline away from you."

Bobby considers that.

Bobby Dean: "You know what, Eric?"

Eric Dane Jr.: "What?"

Bobby Dean: "I hope I win tonight."

Eric smirks.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Obviously."

Bobby shakes his head.

Bobby Dean: "No."

A beat.

Bobby Dean: "I mean the whole thing."

Eric's expression changes.

Bobby Dean: "I hope I win Ring King."

Bobby adjusts the championship.

Bobby Dean: "Because then September twenty-sixth..."

He pauses.

For once, deliberately making Eric wait.

Bobby Dean: "...maybe I walk into that building with this championship..."

He taps the gold.

Bobby Dean: "...beat you..."

Eric's eyes narrow.

Bobby Dean: "...and walk out with a shot at another one."

Silence.

Bobby Dean just said that.

And judging from his own expression...

He believes it.

Maybe not completely.

But more than he did yesterday.

Eric slowly smiles.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You really are starting to believe your own bullshit."

Bobby thinks about it.

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

Eric's smile disappears again.

The callback isn't lost on him.

Eric steps backward.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Fine."

He puts his sunglasses back on.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Go beat Mike Best."

Bobby raises an eyebrow.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Go win the whole damn tournament."

Eric begins backing away.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Hell, Bobby..."

A grin returns.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I hope you do."

Bobby watches him.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Because if you really do end up wrestling twice at Ring King?"

Eric points toward himself.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I don't care whether I'm first."

A beat.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I don't care whether I'm second."

His finger shifts toward Bobby's championship.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Either way..."

Eric's grin widens.

Eric Dane Jr.: "...I'm leaving with that."

Eric turns.

He starts down the corridor.

Bobby watches him go.

Then looks down at the International Championship.

He thinks for a moment.

Bobby Dean: "Two matches."

A pause.

Bobby's eyes widen slightly.

Bobby Dean: "That's... a lot of wrestling."

He thinks some more.

Bobby Dean: "Maybe they have snacks between them."

A production assistant passing nearby tries unsuccessfully not to laugh.

Bobby hears it.

He looks down at the championship again.

The humor fades.

Bobby Dean: "Still doing it."

He taps the faceplate.

Bobby Dean: "Come on."

Bobby lifts the championship onto his shoulder properly.

Then heads toward gorilla position.

Toward Mike Best.

Toward Ring King.

And, whether he likes it or not...

Toward Eric Dane Jr.

Madman Has Left The Building

Segment

Outside Rocket Arena.

The noise from inside the building is reduced to little more than a distant rumble behind concrete and steel.

Production trucks line one side of the service lot.

Rental cars fill the other.

And cutting through the middle of it all is Madman Szalinski.

Bag over one shoulder.

Head down.

Done for the night.

At least...

That's clearly what he thought.

Madman notices the camera following him.

He stops.

Slowly turns around.

Madman Szalinski: "What in the goddamn..."

He stares directly into the lens.

Not angry at first.

More confused.

Suspicious.

The kind of stare somebody gives a smoke detector that suddenly starts blinking for no apparent reason.

Madman Szalinski: "What the hell are you doing here?"

The cameraman says nothing.

Madman looks directly into the lens for another second.

Then around it.

Madman Szalinski: "What?"

A beat.

Madman Szalinski: "You want me to cut ANOTHER promo or something?"

He gestures toward himself.

Madman Szalinski: "I already explained myself."

Madman's expression changes.

A realization.

He quickly looks over his shoulder.

Madman Szalinski: "Or are you about to pan out to someone standing behind me?"

Madman immediately steps toward the cameraman.

He takes hold of the camera rig and forcibly turns them both around.

The shot swings wildly.

Concrete wall.

Loading equipment.

A metal service door.

Nothing else.

Madman points dramatically toward the empty space.

Madman Szalinski: "See?"

He gestures wider.

Madman Szalinski: "There's nobody there."

Madman releases the camera.

He looks almost disappointed that his paranoia wasn't rewarded.

Madman Szalinski: "Fantastic."

He turns and continues walking.

The camera follows.

Madman hears the footsteps behind him.

He doesn't turn this time.

Madman Szalinski: "You know, there used to be a point where finishing your contractual obligations meant people stopped following you around with cameras."

He reaches a row of vehicles.

Stops beside an aggressively ordinary rental car.

Nothing flashy.

Nothing recognizable.

Madman tosses his bag into the back seat.

Then pauses.

He notices the camera is still there.

Madman Szalinski: "You're really committed to this."

No answer.

Madman shakes his head.

Madman Szalinski: "You have no idea what you people just started."

He gets into the driver's seat.

The door slams shut.

The engine roars to life.

One by one...

All four windows roll down.

Madman puts the car into reverse.

He slowly backs out of the parking space.

The camera remains trained on him.

Madman stops.

Looks through the open driver's-side window.

Directly at the camera.

Madman Szalinski: "I see you're choosing the beneath me option...."

He shifts into drive.

The car begins rolling forward.

Slowly.

The camera tracks it.

Madman passes within several feet of the lens.

And that's when—

Something moves in the back seat.

At first...

Just a shadow.

Then a figure begins to sit upright.

Black jacket.

Messy hair.

The camera catches the face.

Chris Ross.

Chris Ross: "I told you..."

Madman's eyes explode wide.

Chris Ross: "Any time..."

Madman's head snaps toward the rearview mirror.

Chris Ross: "Any place..."

Ross leans slightly forward between the seats.

Chris Ross: "Any where...."

Madman lets out a startled shriek.

His foot slams onto the brake.

The car jerks to a sudden stop.

Madman Szalinski: "JESUS CHRIST!"

The camera jolts with the sudden stop.

Ross doesn't flinch.

He just sits there.

Calm.

Almost comfortable.

Madman spins around in the driver's seat.

Madman Szalinski: "WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING IN MY CAR?!"

Ross smiles.

Not wildly.

Not angrily.

Just that cold, unsettling little Reaper smile.

Chris Ross: "Ahhhhh Madman..."

Ross leans forward.

Chris Ross: "Don't worry buddy..."

A beat.

Chris Ross: "Today is not the day."

Madman stares at him.

Trying to decide whether that statement should make him feel better.

It clearly does not.

Chris Ross: "This is just a friendly reminder how easy it is for me..."

Ross reaches forward.

Places one hand on Madman's shoulder.

Madman's eyes immediately drop toward it.

Ross gives him two light pats.

Chris Ross: "Ta Ta for now Madman!"

Ross laughs.

Short.

Quiet.

He reaches for the rear door.

Opens it.

Then casually steps out of the car.

Madman remains frozen in the driver's seat.

Ross shuts the door behind him.

He doesn't run.

Doesn't attack.

Doesn't even look back immediately.

He simply starts walking across the parking lot.

The cameraman instinctively turns and follows.

Madman Szalinski: "HEY!"

Ross keeps walking.

Madman Szalinski: "ROSS!"

Still nothing.

Madman leans halfway out his window.

Madman Szalinski: "HOW THE HELL DID YOU EVEN GET IN HERE?!"

Ross finally stops.

He turns his head slightly.

Not enough to fully face Madman.

Chris Ross: "You don't get it yet."

Madman says nothing.

Ross slowly turns around.

Chris Ross: "Earlier tonight, you told me I could get behind you..."

A beat.

Chris Ross: "...or get crushed beneath you."

Ross' eyes narrow.

Chris Ross: "That's not how this works."

Madman's expression hardens.

Chris Ross: "You don't choose the time."

Ross takes a few slow steps backward.

Chris Ross: "You don't choose the place."

Another step.

Chris Ross: "And you don't get to decide when I collect."

Madman stares from behind the wheel.

Ross' smile returns.

Chris Ross: "In due time..."

A pause.

Chris Ross: "The Reaper will collect."

Another beat.

Chris Ross: "In due time..."

Ross turns away.

He disappears between two production trucks.

The cameraman remains where he is.

Madman's car idles in the middle of the parking lot.

For several seconds...

Madman doesn't move.

Then he looks into the rearview mirror.

At the now-empty back seat.

He reaches behind himself.

Checks it.

Nothing.

Madman turns toward the camera.

Madman Szalinski: "Stop filming me."

The camera stays up.

Madman points directly toward it.

Madman Szalinski: "Seriously."

A beat.

Madman Szalinski: "Stop filming me."

Madman drives away.

The camera watches the taillights disappear toward the exit.

For a moment...

Nothing happens.

Then, somewhere off-camera—

A faint laugh.

Ross.

The screen cuts to black.

Marie Van Claudio vs. Maxx Mayhem

Match

The camera returns to ringside.

The Ring King bracket flashes briefly across the screen.

John Phillips: "We are back with another first-round match in the 2026 Ring King tournament, and after what happened earlier tonight, I have absolutely no idea what we're about to get."

Mark Bravo: "It's Marie Van Claudio against Maxx Mayhem. That sentence alone should've been enough warning."

The lights begin to change.

The opening of "Foreverever" featuring Lindsey Stirling fills Rocket Arena.

The crowd responds as the entrance stage washes in light.

Then out steps—

Marie Van Claudio.

The First Lady of the UTA stops at the top of the stage.

And behind her...

The Empire.

Amy Harrison.

Valkyrie Knoxx.

Trey Mack.

Clovis Black.

The entire group forms behind Marie as she slowly raises her arms.

John Phillips: "Marie Van Claudio qualified for this tournament by defeating Amy Harrison just two weeks ago."

Mark Bravo: "Which was apparently enough to settle their argument about leadership."

Amy stands behind Marie.

Not smiling.

Mark Bravo: "Mostly."

Marie turns slightly.

The Empire poses together.

A united front.

Then—

From behind the curtain...

Maxx Mayhem casually walks out.

No music.

No announcement.

He simply walks right up beside Clovis.

Stops.

Raises one arm.

And joins the pose.

The crowd immediately starts laughing.

John Phillips: "No."

Mark Bravo: "YES."

No member of The Empire notices.

Marie lowers her arms.

She begins walking down the ramp.

The Empire follows.

So does Maxx.

But Maxx doesn't just walk.

He swings both arms dramatically.

Left.

Right.

Left.

Right.

Like he's leading a marching band nobody else can hear.

Mark Bravo: "Look at him!"

John Phillips: "How has nobody noticed?!"

Trey briefly glances sideways.

Maxx immediately stops swinging his arms.

He straightens his posture.

Trey looks forward again.

Maxx resumes.

Even bigger this time.

The crowd laughs louder.

Mark Bravo: "He's going to get himself killed."

John Phillips: "Considering who's walking around him, that's not hyperbole."

Marie reaches ringside.

She climbs the steps.

Amy follows onto the apron.

Valkyrie.

Trey.

Clovis.

And Maxx.

All six enter the ring.

Marie walks to the center.

She raises both arms again.

The Empire forms behind her.

Maxx takes his place beside Trey.

He raises both arms.

Then realizes everyone else only has one arm raised.

Maxx lowers one.

He looks toward Trey.

Copies him exactly.

The crowd is losing it.

John Phillips: "This cannot continue forever."

Mark Bravo: "Why not?"

Marie turns around.

She looks at Amy.

Valkyrie.

Trey.

Clovis.

Then—

Maxx.

Marie keeps turning.

Stops.

Slowly turns back.

Looks at Maxx.

Maxx smiles.

Waves.

Maxx Mayhem: "Ring Queen!"

Marie SCREAMS.

Marie Van Claudio: "HOW ARE YOU STILL HERE?!"

Amy spins around.

Amy Harrison: "OH, FOR FUCK'S SAKE!"

Trey looks genuinely impressed.

Trey Mack: "How long were you behind us?"

Maxx Mayhem: "Long enough to know Clovis needs deodorant."

Clovis' head snaps toward him.

Maxx Mayhem: "That's my cue."

Maxx immediately slides underneath the bottom rope.

He lands outside.

Spreads his arms.

Maxx Mayhem: "Finish the thing!"

Marie points furiously toward him.

Marie Van Claudio: "I AM GOING TO KILL YOU!"

Maxx gives her two thumbs-up.

Maxx Mayhem: "That's the spirit!"

Mark Bravo: "I think Maxx Mayhem may be the only person alive who can make Marie Van Claudio more angry by encouraging her."

The referee finally starts directing everyone out of the ring.

Amy exits.

Valkyrie follows.

Trey.

Clovis.

All four members of The Empire remain at ringside.

Marie turns toward Maxx.

Maxx points toward himself.

Maxx Mayhem: "Me now?"

The referee nods.

Maxx rolls underneath the bottom rope.

No entrance music.

No ceremony.

He's already here.

Maxx pops to his feet.

Marie immediately charges!

Maxx dives behind the referee!

Maxx Mayhem: "BELL FIRST!"

The referee holds Marie back.

Maxx points toward the timekeeper.

Maxx Mayhem: "We are professionals!"

Mark Bravo: "He's been in her locker room twice tonight."

John Phillips: "And now he's concerned with professionalism."

The referee gets both competitors separated.

Maxx retreats into his corner.

Marie stares across the ring at him.

Absolutely furious.

Maxx smiles.

He gives her another thumbs-up.

The referee signals.

DING! DING! DING!

Marie charges immediately!

Maxx sidesteps!

Marie hits the turnbuckles!

Maxx runs toward the opposite ropes.

Marie turns—

Maxx comes charging back!

RUNNING CROSSBODY!

Marie goes down!

Maxx hooks both legs!

ONE!

TWO!

Marie kicks out!

Maxx sits up.

He points toward the referee.

Maxx Mayhem: "That was three."

The referee holds up two fingers.

Maxx holds up three.

The referee holds up two.

Maxx thinks.

Then holds up four.

John Phillips: "I don't think he's negotiating the count."

Marie gets to her feet.

Maxx turns—

SLAP!

Marie cracks him across the face!

Maxx freezes.

His head slowly turns back toward her.

He touches his cheek.

The smile disappears.

Mark Bravo: "There."

A beat.

Mark Bravo: "Funny's over."

Maxx swings!

Marie ducks!

She unloads with a forearm!

Another!

Another!

Maxx staggers backward!

Marie whips him into the ropes!

Maxx rebounds—

Marie catches him with a dropkick!

Maxx tumbles through the ropes!

He crashes to the floor!

The Empire immediately surrounds him.

Maxx looks up.

Amy.

Valkyrie.

Trey.

Clovis.

Maxx looks toward the ring.

Then back at them.

Maxx Mayhem: "This feels unfair."

Clovis takes one step forward.

Maxx scrambles up.

Maxx Mayhem: "I'm going back inside."

He dives underneath the bottom rope.

Marie is waiting.

STOMP!

Another!

Another!

Marie drives Maxx toward the corner.

She climbs onto the middle rope.

Fists rain down.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

FOUR!

FIVE!

The crowd counts with her.

SIX!

SEVEN!

Maxx suddenly grabs Marie around the waist!

He carries her out of the corner!

Marie starts punching his head!

Maxx keeps moving!

He runs across the ring—

BUCKLE BOMB!

Marie crashes against the opposite turnbuckles!

Maxx immediately follows!

CANNONBALL!

Both competitors collapse!

John Phillips: "And this is where Maxx Mayhem becomes dangerous."

Mark Bravo: "Because the joke makes you forget this guy is completely willing to throw his own body into the wall if you're standing between him and it."

Maxx crawls into the cover.

ONE!

TWO!

Marie kicks out!

Maxx pulls her up.

Snap DDT!

Marie plants headfirst!

Another cover!

ONE!

TWO!

Marie kicks out again!

Maxx rolls onto his back.

Looks toward the ceiling.

Maxx Mayhem: "Stubborn skirt."

Marie hears him.

Her eyes open.

Mark Bravo: "Oh, don't say that again."

Maxx gets up.

Marie suddenly takes him down by the legs!

She mounts him!

Right hands!

One after another!

Maxx covers up!

The referee tries to get Marie off him.

She finally stops.

Maxx rolls underneath the bottom rope.

Marie follows.

John Phillips: "And here we go."

Marie grabs Maxx by the back of the head.

She drives him face-first into the apron!

Again!

Maxx staggers.

Marie grabs his wrist.

Whips him toward the barricade—

Maxx reverses!

Marie crashes into the steel!

Maxx charges!

Marie moves!

CRASH!

Maxx goes shoulder-first into the barricade!

He tumbles over it!

Into the crowd!

Mark Bravo: "And we've officially lost control."

Marie climbs over the barricade after him.

The referee starts counting.

ONE!

Marie grabs Maxx.

Maxx grabs a nearby fan's empty popcorn bucket.

He dumps it over Marie's head.

Marie Van Claudio: "WHAT THE HELL?!"

Maxx runs.

TWO!

Marie chases him through the aisle.

Maxx grabs a plastic drink tray.

He holds it like a shield.

Marie kicks directly through it!

Maxx looks down at the broken tray.

Maxx Mayhem: "They charge nine dollars for those."

Marie punches him.

THREE!

Maxx stumbles back toward ringside.

Marie follows.

They climb back over the barricade.

Maxx rolls into the ring.

Marie follows at six.

The count stops.

Maxx immediately catches Marie with a swinging neckbreaker!

Cover!

ONE!

TWO!

Marie kicks out!

Maxx rises.

He looks toward The Empire.

Trey is shouting at Marie to get up.

Maxx points at Trey.

Then mimics him.

Maxx Mayhem: "GET UP, MARIE!"

Trey points furiously.

Trey Mack: "Man, shut up!"

Maxx waves.

Marie comes from behind!

ROLL-UP!

ONE!

TWO!

Maxx escapes!

Both shoot up!

Marie swings!

Maxx ducks!

Discus elbow!

Marie drops!

Maxx falls on top!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

Marie gets the shoulder up!

Maxx stares at the referee.

Then at Marie.

He nods slowly.

No joke now.

He knows she's hard to put away.

Maxx grabs her.

Hooks the head.

He starts setting for the MAXXIMUM CARNAGE!

Marie immediately fights it!

She drives a knee into his body!

Again!

Maxx loses the grip!

Marie breaks free!

She catches Maxx with a jawbreaker!

Maxx staggers!

Marie springs to the ropes—

TORNADO DDT!

Maxx is planted!

Marie covers!

ONE!

TWO!

MAXX KICKS OUT!

Marie slaps the mat.

She gets up.

She looks toward The Empire.

Amy is yelling for her to finish it.

Marie nods.

She pulls Maxx up.

Maxx suddenly grabs her waistband!

He launches her through the ropes!

Marie lands on the apron!

Maxx charges!

Marie catches him with a forearm!

Maxx staggers!

Marie tries to step back inside—

Maxx runs again!

Marie lowers the rope!

Maxx flies over!

He crashes directly into Trey and Clovis!

All three go down!

The crowd erupts!

Mark Bravo: "MAYHEM!"

John Phillips: "He just wiped out half The Empire!"

Amy and Valkyrie immediately back away.

Maxx sits up among Trey and Clovis.

He looks around.

Maxx Mayhem: "Team meeting?"

Clovis' eyes open.

Maxx sees him.

Maxx Mayhem: "Nope."

Maxx scrambles toward the ring!

Clovis grabs his ankle!

The referee sees it!

John Phillips: "Clovis has him!"

The referee immediately leans through the ropes and starts shouting at Clovis.

Clovis releases.

He throws his hands up.

Trey gets to his feet and starts arguing too.

The referee is completely occupied with The Empire.

Maxx slides into the ring.

Marie charges!

Maxx catches her!

CRASH COURSE!

Full-speed cannonball into the corner!

Marie crumples!

Maxx drags her out!

He hooks her!

John Phillips: "MAXXIMUM CARNAGE!"

He lifts—

Marie twists!

She slips free!

Maxx turns—

Marie kicks him low!

The referee is STILL dealing with Clovis and Trey!

Mark Bravo: "OH, COME ON!"

Maxx doubles over!

Marie grabs him!

DDT!

Maxx spikes into the canvas!

Marie looks toward the referee.

Still distracted.

She screams.

Marie Van Claudio: "TURN AROUND!"

The referee finally turns.

Marie covers!

ONE!

TWO!

MAXX KICKS OUT!

The crowd erupts!

Marie stares in disbelief.

John Phillips: "MAXX MAYHEM SURVIVES!"

Mark Bravo: "Even after Marie took the shortcut!"

Marie gets to her feet.

She is furious.

Maxx slowly rises.

Marie charges—

Maxx catches her!

Overhead throw!

Marie lands hard!

Maxx runs toward the ropes.

He rebounds.

Marie suddenly leaps up!

SPINNING HEEL KICK!

Maxx goes down!

Marie doesn't cover.

She pulls him back up.

Maxx can barely stand.

Marie hooks the head.

Maxx shoves her away!

Marie hits the ropes!

She rebounds—

Maxx goes for another discus elbow!

Marie ducks!

Maxx spins around—

CODEBREAKER!

Maxx's face crashes across Marie's knees!

He staggers upright!

Marie grabs him immediately!

SPIKING DDT!

Maxx folds into the canvas!

Marie rolls him over!

Hooks both legs!

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

DING! DING! DING!

The Empire erupts outside the ring!

Marie immediately releases Maxx.

She rolls onto her knees.

Breathing hard.

Exhausted.

But smiling.

John Phillips: "Marie Van Claudio advances!"

Mark Bravo: "And she had to survive every bit of Maxx Mayhem to do it!"

Amy climbs onto the apron.

Trey.

Clovis.

Valkyrie.

The referee raises Marie's hand.

The Empire begins entering the ring.

Marie stands in the center.

They gather around her.

Maxx is still down nearby.

Marie raises both arms.

The Empire forms behind her.

The same pose from the entrance.

Marie smiles.

Then—

Maxx's hand slowly rises from the canvas behind them.

The crowd begins laughing.

Maxx rolls onto one knee.

Then stands.

He quietly steps into place beside Trey.

Raises one arm.

And joins the pose again.

John Phillips: "YOU HAVE GOT TO BE KIDDING ME."

Mark Bravo: "Nobody turn around."

Trey finally notices the crowd laughing.

He looks sideways.

Maxx smiles.

Maxx Mayhem: "Ring Queen."

Trey immediately grabs him.

Trey Mack: "NOPE."

Clovis grabs the other arm.

They drag Maxx toward the ropes.

Maxx raises both fists triumphantly.

Maxx Mayhem: "GOOD MATCH, SKIRT!"

Marie spins around.

Marie Van Claudio: "GET HIM OUT OF HERE!"

Trey and Clovis dump Maxx through the ropes.

Maxx lands on the floor.

He immediately sits up.

Laughing.

Marie glares down at him.

Maxx applauds her.

Genuinely this time.

Marie points at him.

Maxx gives her one last thumbs-up.

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem may have lost the match, but I'm not convinced anybody actually won that interaction."

Mark Bravo: "Marie did."

A tournament graphic fills the screen.

RING KING — ADVANCING TO ROUND TWO

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO

Mark Bravo: "And that's the part that matters. The First Lady of the UTA is moving on."

Marie raises her arms again as The Empire surrounds her.

Outside the ring, Maxx begins backing up the ramp.

Still applauding.

Still grinning.

Still very much Maxx Mayhem.

Ring king

Segment

The screen fades to black.

Silence.

Then—

A single spotlight illuminates an empty throne.

Gold.

Massive.

Waiting.

A low heartbeat begins.

THUMP.

Words slowly appear across the screen.

SIXTEEN ENTERED.

THUMP.

Quick flashes.

The original Ring King field.

Champions.

Qualifiers.

Veterans.

New blood.

All staring toward the same destination.

THUMP.

ONE WILL WEAR THE CROWN.

The music begins.

Low at first.

Cinematic percussion building underneath distorted flashes from the tournament.

Philadelphia.

Kirsty McKinney driving Valentina Blaze into the mat.

Bianca Page standing victorious.

Lindsey Lothario advancing.

Mike Best drilling Valkyrie Knoxx with I KNEED A HERO!

Maxwell Jett standing over Kairo Bey.

The images accelerate.

Manchester.

Sol Azteca.

Madman Szalinski.

Marie Van Claudio.

Maxx Mayhem.

Competitors earning their place.

A deep voice cuts through the music.

Voiceover: "Getting into Ring King was only the beginning."

Cut.

Toronto.

Round One.

Sol Azteca and Selina Santorino exchanging holds at high speed.

Sol stands victorious.

SOL AZTECA — ADVANCED.

Cut.

Bianca Page battling Lindsey Lothario.

Ace Andrews creating the opening.

Bianca capitalizing.

BIANCA PAGE — ADVANCED.

Cut.

Madman Szalinski refusing to stay down.

Samuel Scythe hammering him again.

And again.

Finally...

Scythe standing victorious.

SAMUEL SCYTHER — ADVANCED.

The music suddenly cuts.

Chris Ross.

UTA Championship around his waist.

Standing across from Mikey Unlikely.

A chair rises outside the ring.

CRACK!

Ross collapses.

The referee counts.

Mikey watches.

TEN.

The hood comes down.

Madman Szalinski.

MIKEY UNLIKELY — ADVANCED.

Black.

The heartbeat returns.

THUMP.

Cleveland.

Tonight.

Hakuryu and Kirsty McKinney trading control.

The White Dragon kicking Kirsty across the head.

Kirsty throwing Hakuryu with a German suplex.

Jed Dye appearing.

Sinja throwing the powder.

Hakuryu turning at exactly the wrong moment.

White powder exploding into his eyes.

Kirsty trapping him.

THREE.

KIRSTY McKINNEY — ADVANCED.

Cut.

Maxwell Jett laughing at Emily Hightower.

Emily throwing him across the ring.

The laugh disappearing.

Bianca Page holding Emily's championships.

Emily screaming from inside the ring.

Bianca swinging the title.

CRACK!

Platinum Driver.

THREE.

Maxwell laughing again.

MAXWELL JETT — ADVANCED.

Cut.

Marie Van Claudio standing with The Empire.

Maxx Mayhem inexplicably standing beside them.

The crowd laughing.

Then chaos.

Maxx flying through the barricade.

Marie getting dumped.

Maxx crashing into The Empire.

Marie fighting back.

The final DDT.

THREE.

Marie raises her arms.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO — ADVANCED.

The music begins building again.

The tournament bracket fills the screen.

Names disappearing.

Names advancing.

The field shrinking.

Voiceover: "Every match removes another name."

Sol Azteca.

Bianca Page.

Samuel Scythe.

Mikey Unlikely.

Kirsty McKinney.

Maxwell Jett.

Marie Van Claudio.

One final first-round position remains dark.

Voiceover: "Every victory brings someone closer."

Quick flashes of the seven who have advanced.

Voiceover: "Closer to Los Angeles."

The skyline of Los Angeles at night.

Voiceover: "Closer to the throne."

The empty throne again.

Voiceover: "Closer to immortality."

The music swells.

SEPTEMBER 26, 2026

CRYPTO.COM ARENA

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

The Ring King crown slowly lowers into frame.

Voiceover: "The tournament will continue."

Round Two brackets flash.

Quarterfinal imagery.

Semifinal imagery.

Two shadowed figures standing on opposite sides of the throne.

Voiceover: "Until only two remain."

The silhouettes move toward one another.

Voiceover: "And at Ring King..."

The crown comes into focus.

Voiceover: "...one will rule them all."

The screen explodes into the event logo.

RING KING: 2026

WHO WILL BE CROWNED THE 2026 RING KING?

A beat.

Then the logo disappears.

Another image replaces it.

The UTA International Championship.

Resting alone beneath a spotlight.

A familiar voice.

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

Quick flash.

Eric Dane Jr.

Sunglasses.

Smug.

Confident.

Cut.

Bobby Dean.

The International Championship over his shoulder.

More serious than we're accustomed to seeing him.

Bobby Dean: "Make me prove it."

The beat drops.

One Last Stop.

Eric standing in Bobby's face.

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."

Then—

CRACK!

Bobby Dean punches Eric square in the face.
Eric crashes to the floor.
The music surges.
Bobby stands above him.
Championship still over his shoulder.
Voiceover: "A friendship destroyed."
Eric rubbing his jaw.
Voiceover: "Respect lost."
Bobby clutching the championship.
Voiceover: "And a championship caught between them."
The match graphic slams onto the screen.

UTA INTERNATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

BOBBY DEAN

vs.

ERIC DANE JR.

Eric Dane Jr.: "At Ring King... the joke's over."

Black.

Then—

The throne.

The crown.

The International Championship.

All illuminated together.

RING KING: 2026

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 26

CRYPTO.COM ARENA

LOS ANGELES

A final question appears.

WHO WILL TAKE THE THRONE?

Black.

I'm Mike Best

Segment

Black.

No music.

No graphics.

For several seconds...

Nothing.

Then a light clicks on.

Mike Best.

Standing alone.

The background is completely black.

A narrow beam of light illuminates only the right side of his body.

The other half disappears into shadow.

Mike doesn't look directly into the camera.

Not yet.

His eyes are somewhere beyond it.

Mike Best: "I've beaten men people call great."

Cut.

A different angle.

Closer.

Now the left side of Mike's face is illuminated.

The right disappears completely.

Mike Best: "Hall of Famers."

A beat.

Mike Best: "World Champions."

Another.

Mike Best: "Legends."

Mike's eyes slowly shift toward the lens.

Mike Best: "Men who walked into a room believing their reputation was enough to beat me."

Cut.

Side profile.

Only the edge of his forehead...

His nose...

His mouth...

Visible beneath the light.

Mike Best: "It wasn't."

Black.

A slow breath.

Another light.

Mike from farther away.

His arms hanging loosely at his sides.

Still divided perfectly between light and darkness.

Mike Best: "I've been dropped."

Cut.

Mike Best: "I've been cut open."

Cut.

Mike Best: "I've been pushed until there was supposed to be nothing left."

Cut.

Closer.

Mike Best: "And I kept going."

A pause.

Mike Best: "Not because I'm brave."

Another angle.

Mike Best: "Not because I'm inspiring."

Mike almost smiles.

Almost.

Mike Best: "And sure as hell not because I needed anybody cheering for me."

Cut.

Mike's hands.

Taped.

One thumb slowly running across the knuckles of the opposite hand.

Mike Best: "I kept going because losing has never sat right with me."

Cut back to his face.

Half-light.

Half-shadow.

Mike Best: "People like to talk about toughness."

Mike Best: "About heart."

Mike Best: "About wanting it more."

A small shake of his head.

Mike Best: "Those are nice words."

Mike finally looks directly into the lens.

Mike Best: "I prefer results."

Black.

A beat.

The light returns.

This time Mike is seated.

Elbows resting against his knees.

Only one eye visible.

Mike Best: "I was born into this."

A pause.

Mike Best: "Most people hear that and think it means I was given something."

His jaw tightens slightly.

Mike Best: "They hear the name."

Cut.

Mike Best: "Best."

Cut closer.

Mike Best: "They hear about my father."

A beat.

Mike Best: "Lee Best."

Silence.

Mike Best: "The GOD of HOW."

The words hang there.

No dramatic music underneath them.

Nothing needed.

Mike leans forward slightly.

Mike Best: "And they think they understand."

He shakes his head.

Mike Best: "They don't."

Cut.

Mike standing again.

Different angle.

The light now catches the Hall of Fame ring on his hand.

Mike Best: "Being his son didn't make anything easier."

A pause.

Mike Best: "It made everything harder."

His hand closes into a fist.

Mike Best: "Because when your father calls himself GOD..."

Mike slowly raises his eyes.

Mike Best: "...you don't get to be ordinary."

Black.

Another angle.

Only Mike's shoulder and half of his face.

Mike Best: "You don't get credit for being good."

Cut.

Mike Best: "You don't get celebrated for almost."

Cut.

Mike Best: "You don't get remembered because you tried."

Mike's voice becomes quieter.

Mike Best: "You become the best..."

A long pause.

Mike Best: "...or you become the son who couldn't live up to the name."

Black.

Silence.

Then—

Mike's voice.

Mike Best: "So I became the best."

The light returns.

Tighter shot.

Mike Best: "I won championships."

Cut.

Mike Best: "I survived wars."

Cut.

Mike Best: "I beat people who were supposed to be unbeatable."

Cut.

Mike Best: "I made enemies."

Another.

Mike Best: "I made history."

Another.

Mike Best: "And somewhere along the way..."

Mike's Hall of Fame ring catches the light again.

Mike Best: "...they started calling me a legend."

His expression shows exactly what he thinks about that.

Mike Best: "I hate that word."

A beat.

Mike Best: "Legend."

He almost spits it.

Mike Best: "Sounds finished."

Cut.

Mike Best: "Sounds like something you talk about because it isn't happening anymore."

Mike steps forward.

For the first time, his body moves partially out of the shadow.

Mike Best: "I'm not finished."

Another step.

Mike Best: "I'm not here so people can remember what Mike Best used to be."

Closer.

Mike Best: "I'm here to remind them what Mike Best still is."

Black.

A low sound begins underneath the darkness.

Not music.

Almost like distant thunder.

Mike's voice continues.

Mike Best: "The Son of GOD."

A light comes on.

Half of his face.

Mike Best: "Not because my father gave me the name."

The opposite angle.

The other half.

Mike Best: "Because I spent my entire life proving I could carry it."

Cut.

Mike Best: "You can hate me."

Cut.

Mike Best: "You can doubt me."

Cut.

Mike Best: "You can call me arrogant."

A faint smile.

Mike Best: "You'd be right."

Another angle.

Mike Best: "You can call me old."

The smile disappears.

Mike Best: "Do it to my face."

Black.

A long silence.

Then the image slowly fades back in.

For the first time...

Mike Best's entire face is illuminated.

No shadow.

No profile.

No clever framing.

Just Mike.

Looking directly into the camera.

The camera slowly pushes closer.

Mike Best: "I've been doing this long enough that I don't need to tell you I'm dangerous."

A beat.

Mike Best: "I don't need to tell you I'm accomplished."

Closer.

Mike Best: "I don't need to tell you I'm one of the greatest wrestlers who ever lived."

Closer still.

Mike Best: "The record already did that for me."

Mike stares directly through the lens.

One final pause.

Mike Best: "I'm the Son of GOD."

A beat.

Mike Best: "I'm a Hall of Famer."

Another.

The camera is now tight on his face.

Mike Best: "I'm Mike Best."

Black.

Mike Best vs. Bobby Dean

Match

The camera returns to ringside.

Rocket Arena is standing.

The atmosphere has changed.

This isn't another match on the card.

This is the main event.

The final first-round match in the 2026 Ring King tournament.

Seven names have already moved on.

One spot remains.

A tournament graphic fills the screen.

RING KING — ROUND ONE

MIKE BEST

vs.

BOBBY DEAN

WINNER ADVANCES TO ROUND TWO

The graphic fades.

The camera sweeps across the packed arena.

John Phillips: "This is it."

Mark Bravo: "One more match. One more name. And then the second round of Ring King is set."

John Phillips: "And there is history standing on both sides of this main event."

A beat.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean is the reigning UTA International Champion. Earlier tonight, Eric Dane Junior reminded Bobby that regardless of what happens in this tournament, the two of them already have a championship match waiting at Ring King on September twenty-sixth."

Mark Bravo: "Which means if Bobby wins this tournament, he could potentially walk into Los Angeles looking at one hell of a night."

John Phillips: "But Bobby Dean can't think about Los Angeles yet."

The camera settles on the empty entranceway.

John Phillips: "Because standing between him and Round Two is one of the most accomplished competitors of his generation."

The arena lights suddenly cut.

Black.

For a moment...

Nothing.

Then a voice cuts through the darkness.

"Something special 'bout me, you can already tell the energy is different."

The crowd immediately erupts.

The opening of "Pandemonium" by NF begins to build throughout Rocket Arena.

Mark Bravo: "Here we go."

"Confidence is at the highest level, I don't ever see it dippin'."

White lights begin flashing across the stage.

"Try me if you wanna, guarantee though you gon' wish you hadn't did it."

The reaction grows.

"That's a war that you could never win, but hey, I like the optimism."

"WOO!"

The beat drops.

And the Son of GOD steps through the curtain.

Mike Best.

He stops at the top of the entranceway.

No smile.

No joke.

No acknowledgement of anyone else.

The same man who, earlier tonight, stood half-hidden in darkness and told the world exactly who he is now stands completely beneath the arena lights.

The UTA Hall of Fame ring glints on his hand.

Mike looks toward the ring.

Only the ring.

John Phillips: "We heard from Mike Best earlier tonight in one of the most personal pieces we've ever seen from him."

Mark Bravo: "And I think the message was pretty simple."

John Phillips: "Mike Best doesn't believe he is here to relive his career."

Mark Bravo: "He's here because he thinks there's still more career left."

Mike starts down the ramp.

Slowly.

Not the exaggerated saunter we've seen from him before.

There's still confidence in every step.

That will never leave Mike Best.

But tonight there's something more focused beneath it.

Purpose.

John Phillips: "Mike Best qualified for this tournament by defeating Valkyrie Knoxx."

Mark Bravo: "And let's remember how he did it. She avoided I KNEED A HERO once. She avoided it twice."

John Phillips: "She did not avoid it the third time."

Mark Bravo: "Nobody does forever."

The camera tightens on Mike.

He doesn't play to the crowd.

Doesn't slap hands.

A fan reaches over the barricade.

Mike walks straight past.

John Phillips: "I KNEED A HERO has never been kicked out of."

Mark Bravo: "And Bobby Dean knows that."

John Phillips: "Everyone knows that."

Mike reaches the bottom of the ramp.

He stops.

Looks up at the ring.

Then slowly turns toward the nearest camera.

For just a second...

That familiar arrogance returns.

Mike raises his left hand.

The Hall of Fame ring catches the light.

He doesn't flip off the camera this time.

He simply holds the hand there.

Lets the image speak.

John Phillips: "UTA Hall of Famer."

Mark Bravo: "Former World Champion elsewhere. Decades of experience. More wars than most of this roster has matches."

Mike lowers his hand.

Mark Bravo: "And none of that guarantees him a damn thing tonight."

Mike hears it.

He glances toward the commentary desk.

Bravo doesn't back down.

Mike gives him the slightest nod.

Fair enough.

John Phillips: "Because tonight isn't about Mike Best's résumé."

Mike steps onto the apron.

John Phillips: "It's about Bobby Dean."

Mike grabs the top rope.

He steps through.

Into a UTA ring.

He walks directly toward the center.

The crowd remains loud.

Mike stands there.

Head slightly lowered.

Taking it in.

Mark Bravo: "And here's something that matters to me."

Mike raises his head.

Mark Bravo: "Mike Best knows Bobby Dean."

John Phillips: "Very well."

Mark Bravo: "He knows the jokes."

John Phillips: "He knows the reputation."

Mark Bravo: "But he also knows what Bobby Dean used to be capable of when that bell rang."

Mike walks toward his corner.

He grabs the top rope with both hands.

Leans forward.

Stretches his shoulders.

John Phillips: "And that's why I don't think you're going to see Mike Best laughing at Bobby Dean tonight."

Mark Bravo: "Not like Maxwell Jett laughed at Emily earlier."

John Phillips: "No."

Mike rolls his neck.

John Phillips: "Mike knows better."

The music continues.

Mike turns back toward the entranceway.

His expression is serious.

Almost expectant.

Mark Bravo: "I think Mike Best wants to find out if that Bobby Dean is still in there."

Mike takes one step toward the middle of the ring.

He looks toward the curtain.

Then raises one hand.

Curled his fingers toward himself.

Come on.

John Phillips: "And Bobby Dean has spent months proving to everyone else that he belongs here."

The camera pushes closer on Mike.

John Phillips: "Now he has to prove it to Mike Best."

Mike's theme begins to fade.

The crowd rises again in anticipation.

Mike remains standing in the center of the ring.

Waiting.

No mockery.

No dismissal.

Just a Hall of Famer waiting for another Hall of Famer.

Mark Bravo: "The Son of GOD is ready."

A beat.

John Phillips: "And now comes the International Champion."

Mike Best remains standing near the center of the ring.

His music has faded.

His eyes remain fixed on the entranceway.

Waiting.

Then—

? "The Best Around" ?

Rocket Arena erupts.

Mike's eyebrows rise slightly.

The corner of his mouth threatens a smile.

Mark Bravo: "Well, if there was ever a song choice designed specifically to annoy Mike Best..."

John Phillips: "I don't think Bobby picked it tonight."

Mark Bravo: "Doesn't make it less funny."

The camera turns toward the entrance.

And there he is.

"Beautiful" Bobby Dean.

Seated on his battered, refurbished mobility scooter.

The thing still looks like it has survived several minor vehicular incidents and at least one repair performed entirely with optimism.

But tonight...

Nobody is really looking at the scooter.

The UTA International Championship rests across Bobby's lap.

Bobby sits at the top of the ramp.

He doesn't immediately move.

Doesn't hit the horn.

Doesn't wave wildly.

Doesn't smile.

He just looks toward the ring.

Toward Mike Best.

Mike looks back.

John Phillips: "Take a look at Bobby Dean."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah."

A beat.

Mark Bravo: "That's not the Bobby Dean we're used to seeing."

Bobby looks down.

At the International Championship.

His hand moves across the center plate.

Slowly.

Almost reassuring himself that it's still there.

Then he lifts his head.

And starts forward.

The scooter hums down the ramp.

Slowly.

Deliberately.

John Phillips: "Earlier tonight, Eric Dane Junior once again questioned whether Bobby Dean belongs where he is."

Mark Bravo: "And for months, that's been the question hanging over Bobby."

The camera gets tighter.

Bobby's eyes remain on the ring.

Mark Bravo: "Is this real?"

John Phillips: "Did he really earn that championship?"

Mark Bravo: "Can Bobby Dean actually compete at this level?"

Bobby continues toward ringside.

Fans along the barricade reach toward him.

Normally, Bobby would be slapping every hand he could reach.

Tonight...

He gives a few small acknowledgements.

A nod.

A brief touch of a hand.

But his focus always returns to Mike.

John Phillips: "The answer to at least one of those questions is already sitting in Bobby Dean's lap."

The International Championship catches the arena lights.

John Phillips: "Whatever anybody thought was going to happen when Bobby Dean returned to the UTA, he is the International Champion."

Mark Bravo: "And that's not an old Hardcore belt he found in storage."

John Phillips: "That's not nostalgia."

Mark Bravo: "That's current."

John Phillips: "That's real."

Bobby reaches the bottom of the ramp.

The scooter comes to a stop.

Mike Best walks toward the ropes.

He looks down at Bobby.

No laughter.

No mockery.

Bobby looks up at him.

The two Hall of Famers stare at one another.

Mark Bravo: "And look at Mike."

John Phillips: "That's respect."

Mark Bravo: "Maybe."

John Phillips: "Mike Best could've come out here laughing. Plenty of people have."

Mike takes one step backward from the ropes.

Giving Bobby room.

John Phillips: "He isn't."

Bobby lifts the International Championship from his lap.

He starts to climb off the scooter.

It takes a moment.

One leg down.

Then the other.

Bobby stands.

The crowd applauds.

He places the championship over his shoulder.

Then looks at the scooter.

For just a second...

Old instincts.

Bobby reaches toward the horn.

He stops himself.

The crowd laughs lightly.

Bobby looks at them.

A faint smile finally appears.

Then—

HONK.

Bobby hits it once.

Just once.

The crowd cheers.

Even Mike Best laughs.

Bobby nods.

That's enough.

Mark Bravo: "Okay."

John Phillips: "He's still Bobby."

Mark Bravo: "Good."

Bobby turns away from the scooter.

The smile disappears again.

He walks toward the steel steps.

John Phillips: "But Bobby Dean's changed."

Bobby climbs.

Slowly.

One step at a time.

John Phillips: "You can see it."

Mike backs toward his corner.

Never taking his eyes off Bobby.

Bobby reaches the apron.

He pauses.

Looks down at the International Championship.

The words from the last several months almost seem to hang over him.

The joke.

The comic relief.

The punchline.

Then something else.

He earned it.

Bobby grips the championship tighter.

He steps through the ropes.

The crowd gets louder.

Mark Bravo: "You know what I'm thinking about right now?"

John Phillips: "What's that?"

Mark Bravo: "All those years."

Bobby walks toward the center of the ring.

Mark Bravo: "All the stupid stuff."

Bobby looks across at Mike.

Mark Bravo: "All the times Bobby Dean walked into a building and everybody wondered what ridiculous thing he was gonna do."

Bobby removes the International Championship from his shoulder.

Mark Bravo: "And now here we are."

He raises it.

Rocket Arena cheers.

Mark Bravo: "Main event."

A beat.

Mark Bravo: "International Champion."

Another.

Mark Bravo: "Across the ring from Mike Best."

Bobby lowers the championship.

Mike slowly walks out of his corner.

The two men meet near the center.

No microphone.

No confrontation.

Just a stare.

Mike's eyes drop toward the International Championship.

Then return to Bobby.

Mike gives him a small nod.

Bobby looks almost surprised by it.

Then returns the nod.

John Phillips: "These two have known each other a very long time."

Mark Bravo: "Mike knows exactly what Bobby's reputation is."

John Phillips: "And I think Mike also remembers something a lot of people forgot."

The referee approaches.

Bobby reluctantly hands over the International Championship.

John Phillips: "Before Bobby Dean became everybody's favorite punchline..."

The referee raises the championship briefly before handing it through the ropes.

John Phillips: "...there was a wrestler underneath all of it."

Mike hears the commentary.

He continues staring at Bobby.

Then he says something quietly.

The camera barely catches it.

Mike Best: "I know you're in there."

Bobby's expression changes.

Mike steps closer.

Mike Best: "Show me."

Bobby doesn't answer.

Not verbally.

He rolls his shoulders.

Plants his feet.

Raises his hands.

Ready.

Mike's mouth curls into the slightest smile.

Mark Bravo: "Oh."

John Phillips: "Mike Best isn't here to embarrass Bobby Dean."

Mike backs toward his corner.

John Phillips: "He wants to beat him."

Bobby heads toward the opposite corner.

Mark Bravo: "There's a difference."

The referee checks both competitors.

Mike Best.

Ready.

Bobby Dean.

Ready.

The crowd rises.

Seven names are already waiting in Round Two.

Only one of these men will join them.

John Phillips: "For the first time ever inside a UTA ring..."

Mike lowers into his stance.

Bobby grips the ropes one last time.

John Phillips: "...Mike Best."

Bobby releases.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean."

They stare across the ring.

Mark Bravo: "Last spot in Round Two."

The referee moves into position.

John Phillips: "Let's find out who wants it more."

The referee signals.

DING! DING! DING!

The bell rings.

Neither man charges.

Mike Best takes one slow step out of his corner.

Bobby Dean does the same.

The crowd is still loud from the entrances, but the noise begins to settle into anticipation.

Mike circles.

Bobby follows.

John Phillips: "You can feel the difference here."

Mark Bravo: "Nobody's waiting for a run-in. Nobody's looking over their shoulder. This is two Hall of Famers trying to take the last spot in Round Two."

Mike raises his hands.

Bobby raises his.

They move closer.

Collar-and-elbow tie-up.

Mike immediately pivots.

Wrist control.

He twists Bobby's arm and steps behind him.

Bobby grimaces.

Mike transitions into a hammerlock.

Then a side headlock.

Then back to the wrist.

Fast.

Clean.

Efficient.

Bobby tries to follow each transition.

He's a half-step behind every time.

John Phillips: "Mike Best testing Bobby right away."

Mark Bravo: "Not trying to hurt him yet. He's asking questions."

Mike twists the wrist again.

Bobby winces.

Mike looks directly at him.

Mike Best: "Come on."

Bobby tries to pull free.

Mike keeps control.

Mike Best: "Come on, Bobby."

He cranks the arm again.

Bobby's face tightens.

Then Bobby suddenly steps in.

He drives his shoulder into Mike's chest.

Mike releases the wrist.

Bobby follows with another shoulder.

And another.

Mike gets backed into the ropes.

The referee calls for the break.

Bobby stops.

He backs away.

Mike stays against the ropes for a moment.

He looks at Bobby.

Then nods.

Mark Bravo: "There you go."

Mike steps forward again.

Lockup.

This time Bobby immediately leans his full weight into it.

Mike gives ground.

Bobby keeps driving.

Mike's boots slide across the canvas.

Into the corner.

The referee calls for another break.

Bobby releases.

Mike stays in the corner.

Bobby takes one step back.

Mike reaches up.

Slaps Bobby across the face.

Not hard enough to drop him.

Hard enough to make a point.

The crowd reacts.

Bobby freezes.

Mike steps out of the corner.

Mike Best: "That's not him."

Bobby stares.

John Phillips: "Mike Best is trying to provoke him."

Mark Bravo: "Absolutely."

Mike taps Bobby lightly on the chest.

Mike Best: "Where is he?"

Bobby's jaw tightens.

Mike backs away.

Inviting him.

Bobby comes forward.

Mike shoots low.

Single-leg takedown.

Bobby hits the mat.

Mike immediately floats over.

Front facelock.

Bobby tries to rise.

Mike stuffs him back down.

Bobby gets one knee underneath him.

Mike changes grips.

Waistlock.

Bobby stands.

Mike lifts—

Belly-to-back suplex!

Bobby hits hard.

Mike doesn't cover.

He gets up.

Waits.

Bobby rolls to his side.

Mike stands over him.

Mike Best: "Get up."

Bobby looks up.

Mike takes a step back.

Mike Best: "Get up."

Bobby pushes himself to his knees.

Mike blasts him with a kick across the chest.

THWACK!

Bobby falls backward.

The crowd reacts.

Mike walks after him.

Another kick.

THWACK!

Bobby rolls toward the ropes.

Mike follows.

He grabs Bobby by the head and pulls him upright.

Knife-edge chop!

SMACK!

Bobby's chest turns red.

Another.

SMACK!

Bobby backs into the corner.

Mike follows.

Mounted punches.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

Bobby grabs Mike around the waist.

Mike keeps punching.

FOUR!

FIVE!

Bobby steps out of the corner.

Mike's eyes widen.

Bobby carries him toward the center.

Then drops him with a huge inverted atomic drop!

Mike recoils.

Bobby hits the ropes.

Full-weight shoulder block!

Mike goes down!

The crowd pops.

Bobby hits the opposite ropes.

Mike gets up.

Bobby comes back—

Mike sidesteps.

Bobby hits the ropes again.

Mike catches him with a running snap dropkick!

Bobby crashes backward.

Mike covers.

ONE!

TWO!

Bobby kicks out.

Mike immediately hooks the arm.

Fujiwara armbar.

Bobby yells.

Mike leans back.

Pulling the arm away from Bobby's body.

Bobby reaches toward the ropes.

Too far.

John Phillips: "This is where Mike Best is so dangerous. Every position becomes another position."

Mark Bravo: "And he doesn't care if he beats Bobby by pinfall, submission, knockout, or exhaustion. He just wants the next round."

Bobby tries to crawl.

Mike keeps the arm.

Bobby uses his free hand.

Pushes against the mat.

Inches forward.

Mike shifts his weight.

Bobby reaches again.

Fingertips touch the rope.

Mike immediately releases.

Clean.

He stands.

Bobby pulls himself toward the corner.

Mike watches him.

Bobby uses the ropes to get upright.

Mike walks toward him.

Mike Best: "Still waiting."

Bobby looks at him.

Mike Best: "You gonna show up tonight?"

Bobby says nothing.

Mike shoves him lightly.

Bobby rocks back against the turnbuckles.

Mike shoves him again.

Mike Best: "Or did I get the mascot?"

The crowd reacts.

Bobby's expression changes.

Mike sees it.

Pushes again.

Mike Best: "That's closer."

Bobby suddenly fires a right hand!

Mike's head snaps sideways!

Rocket Arena explodes!

Mike slowly turns back.

Bobby looks down at his fist.

Then at Mike.

Bobby Dean: "Still hurts."

Mike smiles.

Mike Best: "Good."

Mike throws a right!

Bobby fires back!

Mike!

Bobby!

Mike!

Bobby!

The crowd rises with every shot.

Bobby lands another right.

Mike stumbles.

Bobby lands another.

Mike backs into the ropes.

Bobby charges—

Huge clothesline!

Mike flips over the top rope!
He lands hard on the floor!
The crowd erupts.
Bobby stands inside the ring.
Breathing hard.
Looking down at Mike.
Mike slowly sits up.
He wipes his mouth.
Looks at his hand.
A little blood.
Mike looks back toward Bobby.
Then smiles.
A real smile.
Mark Bravo: "There he is."
John Phillips: "Mike Best wanted Bobby Dean."
Mike gets to his feet on the floor.
John Phillips: "I think he just found him."
The referee begins the count.
ONE!
Mike doesn't move toward the ring.
Not yet.
He just looks up at Bobby.
Bobby looks back.
TWO!
Mike points toward Bobby.
Then toward himself.
Mike Best: "Now we're wrestling."
Bobby's breathing is heavy.
But for the first time tonight...
He smiles.
Not the goofy grin.
Not the nervous laugh.
A fighter's smile.

THREE!

Mike slides back into the ring.

Bobby immediately comes after him.

Mike meets him halfway.

Forearm!

Bobby fires back!

Mike drives a knee into the body!

Bobby answers with a clubbing forearm!

Mike staggers!

Bobby grabs him.

Irish whip!

Mike reverses!

Bobby hits the ropes.

Mike drops down.

Bobby steps over.

He hits the opposite ropes.

Mike gets up.

Bobby charges—

RUNNING FULL-WEIGHT LARIAT!

No!

Mike ducks!

Bobby spins around.

Mike grabs him!

NORTHERN LIGHTS SUPLEX!

Bridge!

ONE!

TWO!

Bobby powers out!

Both men rise.

Mike shoots forward.

Bobby catches him!

Bearhug!

Mike immediately starts firing elbows into the side of Bobby's head.

Bobby squeezes harder.

Mike grimaces.

Another elbow.

Bobby refuses to let go.

Mike tries to pry the arms apart.

Can't.

Bobby lifts him!

BELLY-TO-BELLY SUPLEX!

Mike flies across the ring!

The crowd erupts!

Bobby covers!

ONE!

TWO!

Mike kicks out!

Bobby sits beside him.

Breathing hard.

The crowd is fully behind the match now.

John Phillips: "This is becoming exactly what Mike Best wanted."

Mark Bravo: "Careful what you wish for."

Bobby gets up.

He pulls Mike with him.

Mike suddenly catches Bobby with an elbow!

Bobby staggers.

Mike fires another!

Bobby absorbs it.

Mike kicks the thigh.

Again.

Again.

Bobby's leg starts to buckle.

Mike sees it.

He changes targets instantly.

Low kick.

Another.

Bobby tries to grab him.
Mike steps away.
Kick to the knee.
Bobby drops to one knee.
Mike hits the ropes.
The crowd rises—
Bobby sees him coming.
Mike stops himself.
He was thinking about it.
I KNEED A HERO.
But Bobby isn't seated.
Not positioned.
Mike changes direction.
Instead—
Running knee to the chest!
Bobby goes backward into the ropes.
Mike follows with a lariat!
Bobby doesn't go down.
Mike looks surprised.
Bobby fires a right hand!
Mike stumbles backward.
Bobby steps forward.
Mike blasts him with a superkick!
Bobby staggers.
Doesn't fall.
Mike's eyes widen.
Bobby shakes his head.
Mike laughs.
Mike Best: "There you are."
Bobby charges.
Mike charges too.
They collide in the center of the ring!
Both men go down!

The crowd erupts!

John Phillips: "What a main event!"

Mark Bravo: "And we are just getting started!"

Mike rolls onto his back.

Bobby does the same.

The referee checks both.

Neither man is finished.

Not even close.

Both men are down.

The crowd stays on its feet.

Mike Best rolls toward the ropes.

Bobby Dean rolls toward the opposite side.

The referee begins to count.

ONE!

Mike gets an arm underneath himself.

TWO!

Bobby reaches for the middle rope.

THREE!

Mike is on one knee.

FOUR!

Bobby pulls himself upright.

Both men are standing.

Across the ring.

Breathing heavily.

Looking at one another.

John Phillips: "This has become a completely different match than it was five minutes ago."

Mark Bravo: "Because Mike Best got what he wanted."

A beat.

Mark Bravo: "He wanted the old Bobby Dean."

Mike raises his hands again.

Bobby does the same.

Mark Bravo: "Now he's got him."

They meet in the center.

Forearm from Mike.

Bobby answers.

Mike.

Bobby.

Mike fires a knee into the body.

Bobby doubles over.

Mike grabs him.

Snap suplex!

Bobby hits hard.

Mike floats over.

Cover.

ONE!

TWO!

Bobby kicks out!

Mike doesn't hesitate.

He hooks the arm.

Transitions.

Ground choke.

Bobby immediately starts fighting the hands.

Mike gets his legs around the body.

Squeezes.

Bobby's face starts to turn red.

John Phillips: "Mike Best is trying to take the air away from him now."

Mark Bravo: "Smart. Bobby's size is one thing when he's moving. Make him carry Mike's weight, make him fight for every breath, and eventually that tank starts emptying."

Bobby reaches toward the ropes.

Too far.

Mike tightens the choke.

Bobby shifts his hips.

Mike adjusts with him.

Bobby tries again.

Mike stays glued to his back.

The crowd begins clapping.

Bobby plants one hand on the mat.

Then the other.
He starts pushing himself up.
Mike's eyes widen.
Bobby gets to one knee.
Mike keeps the choke.
Bobby gets to both feet.
With Mike Best hanging from his back.
Rocket Arena erupts!
John Phillips: "Bobby is standing!"
Mark Bravo: "With Mike Best on him!"
Bobby staggers backward.
Once.
Twice.
Then throws himself backward into the turnbuckles!
CRASH!
Mike gets crushed between Bobby and the corner!
The hold breaks.
Bobby stumbles forward.
Mike remains against the turnbuckles.
Bobby turns.
Charges!
AVALANCHE SPLASH!
Mike gets flattened!
Bobby grabs him.
Pulls him out of the corner.
Huge body slam!
Mike crashes down!
Bobby hits the ropes.
The crowd rises.
Bobby comes back—
BIG SPLASH!
He lands across Mike's chest!
Cover!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

Mike gets the shoulder up!

The crowd groans.

Bobby rolls onto his back.

Stares at the ceiling.

John Phillips: "That was close!"

Mark Bravo: "Very close."

Bobby sits up.

Looks at Mike.

Then looks toward the International Championship at ringside.

Just for a second.

Mike notices.

Mike Best: "Eyes here."

Bobby looks back at him.

Mike is already rising.

Bobby gets up.

Mike throws a low kick.

Bobby catches the leg.

Mike immediately jumps—

Enzuigiri!

Bobby staggers sideways.

Mike gets up.

Runs.

Baseball slide dropkick to Bobby's knee!

Bobby drops down.

Mike grabs the leg.

Turns Bobby over.

SASORI-GATAME!

Sharpshooter!

Bobby screams.

Mike sits back.

Deep.

The referee asks Bobby if he wants to submit.

Bobby shakes his head violently.

Bobby Dean: "NO!"

Mike pulls harder.

Bobby reaches forward.

The ropes are far away.

He claws at the canvas.

Inch by inch.

Mike leans back farther.

Bobby stops moving.

The referee checks him.

Bobby shakes his head.

Starts crawling again.

John Phillips: "This is where Mike Best's experience matters."

Mark Bravo: "And Bobby Dean's stubbornness."

Bobby reaches.

Still too far.

Mike pulls.

Bobby's face twists in pain.

He reaches again.

His fingertips brush the bottom rope.

Not enough.

Mike drags him backward!

The crowd reacts loudly.

Bobby slaps the mat.

Not tapping.

Frustrated.

He plants both forearms.

Pushes.

Mike tries to sit deeper.

Bobby turns his body.

Twists.

Mike loses his balance!
Bobby kicks him away!
Mike crashes into the ropes!
Bobby rolls onto his back.
Both men breathe.
John Phillips: "Bobby Dean escapes!"
Mike gets up first.
He walks toward Bobby.
Bobby tries to stand.
Mike kicks the leg.
Bobby drops to one knee.
Mike hits the ropes.
This time—
He commits.
John Phillips: "LOOK OUT!"
Mike charges—
Bobby rolls sideways!
I KNEED A HERO MISSES!
Mike flies past!
The crowd erupts!
Mark Bravo: "HE AVOIDED IT!"
Mike turns—
Bobby grabs him!
Huge side slam!
Cover!
ONE!
TWO!
THR—
MIKE KICKS OUT!
Bobby slaps the mat.
He can't believe it.
Mike rolls toward the ropes.
Bobby gets up.

He's tired now.

Very tired.

But there is momentum.

The crowd feels it.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean may be moments away from the biggest singles victory of his career!"

Mark Bravo: "And nobody came out here to help him. Nobody handed him this."

Bobby pulls Mike up.

Hooks him.

Mike blocks.

Bobby tries again.

Mike drives an elbow into Bobby's temple.

Bobby keeps the grip.

Another elbow.

Bobby still doesn't release.

Mike fires a third.

Bobby finally lets go.

Mike backs away.

Bobby charges.

Mike ducks.

Bobby hits the ropes.

Comes back—

FULL-WEIGHT LARIAT!

MIKE BEST TURNS BOBBY INSIDE OUT!

Both men go down!

The crowd erupts!

John Phillips: "GOOD LORD!"

Mike crawls.

Cover!

ONE!

TWO!

BOBBY KICKS OUT!

Mike sits up.

His eyes narrow.

Now there is no smile.
No teaching.
No trying to bring something out of Bobby.
He has it.
Now he's trying to win.
Mark Bravo: "That's it."
John Phillips: "What's it?"
Mark Bravo: "Mike Best is done testing him."
Mike gets to his feet.
He pulls Bobby up.
Forearm.
Bobby answers.
Mike kicks the leg.
Bobby fires a right.
Mike answers with an elbow.
Bobby with another right.
Mike with a knee.
Bobby absorbs it.
Mike throws another.
Bobby grabs him.
Headbutt!
Mike staggers.
Bobby grabs him around the waist.
BELLY-TO-BELLY SUPLEX!
Mike flies!
Bobby collapses beside him.
The crowd chants.
BOB-BY!
BOB-BY!
BOB-BY!
Bobby hears them.
He looks toward the crowd.
Almost confused.

Then back at Mike.

Mike is on his knees.

Bobby gets up.

Mike looks at him.

Bobby raises one fist.

The same fist that knocked Eric Dane Jr. down at One Last Stop.

Mike smiles through the exhaustion.

Mike Best: "Do it."

Bobby charges.

Right hand!

Mike blocks!

Mike grabs the arm.

Armbar transition!

Bobby immediately rolls through!

Mike stays attached!

Bobby powers him upward!

Mike's feet leave the canvas!

Bobby lifts him!

Powerbomb!

BOOM!

Mike folds!

Bobby collapses into the cover!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

MIKE BEST KICKS OUT!

Rocket Arena loses it.

Bobby stays on top of Mike.

Stares at him.

He looks toward the referee.

Two.

Only two.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean almost did it!"

Mark Bravo: "Mike Best wanted the old Bobby Dean."

Bobby slowly gets up.

Mike rolls onto one knee.

Mark Bravo: "He might've gotten more than he bargained for."

Bobby hits the ropes.

Mike stays kneeling.

Bobby charges—

Mike suddenly explodes upward!

HASHTAG MUTED!

SUPERKICK!

Bobby's head snaps backward!

He doesn't fall.

He wobbles.

Mike stares.

Bobby shakes his head.

Charges again.

Mike sidesteps.

Bobby hits the ropes.

Rebounds—

Mike catches him.

SPINNING SPINEBUSTER!

Bobby hits hard!

Mike covers!

ONE!

TWO!

Bobby kicks out again!

Mike pounds the mat once.

Not angry.

Focused.

He grabs Bobby.

Pulls him up.

Tries for the Gilded Cage.

Bobby realizes it.

He backs Mike into the corner.
Once.
Twice.
Mike releases.
Bobby turns.
Mike catches him with a knee to the body.
Bobby doubles over.
Mike hooks him.
Northern Lights suplex!
Mike rolls through!
Keeps control!
Another suplex!
Bobby crashes down!
Mike rolls again.
He's breathing hard.
Bobby's weight is taking its toll.
Mike gets him up one more time.
Belly-to-belly!
Bobby flies across the canvas!
John Phillips: "All the fucking suplexes!"
Mark Bravo: "Technical term."
Mike sits against the ropes.
Chest heaving.
Bobby lies several feet away.
Mike looks at him.
Then toward the crowd.
Then back at Bobby.
He points.
Mike Best: "Get up."
Bobby stirs.
Mike Best: "Come on."
Bobby rolls to one knee.
Mike rises.

Bobby uses the ropes.
Gets up.
Mike walks toward him.
Bobby swings.
Mike ducks.
Elbow.
Bobby staggers.
Mike kicks the knee.
Bobby drops down.
One knee.
Mike steps backward.
The crowd knows.
John Phillips: "Bobby has to move!"
Mike hits the ropes.
Bobby looks up.
I KNEED A HERO!
NO!
Bobby catches Mike!
The crowd explodes!
Bobby has him around the waist!
Mike's eyes go wide!
Bobby stands!
He lifts Mike!
HUGE BELLY-TO-BELLY!
MIKE BEST CRASHES DOWN!
Bobby collapses!
Mark Bravo: "HE CAUGHT IT!"
John Phillips: "Bobby Dean caught I KNEED A HERO!"
The crowd is deafening.
Bobby crawls.
Mike crawls.
Bobby reaches him first.
Hooks the leg!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

MIKE BEST GETS THE SHOULDER UP!

Bobby falls backward.

Hands on his head.

Mike lies motionless.

The crowd is chanting again.

Bobby looks toward the International Championship.

Then at Mike.

He slowly gets up.

Mike starts to rise.

Bobby points toward him.

Then toward himself.

Almost mirroring what Mike did earlier.

Bobby Dean: "Now we're wrestling."

Mike hears him.

His eyes open.

He smiles.

Then both men start getting to their feet.

Slowly.

Every movement harder than the last.

John Phillips: "Neither one of these men has anything left to prove to the other."

Mark Bravo: "Now they just have to beat each other."

Mike Best gets one foot underneath him.

Bobby Dean does the same.

Neither man is interested in waiting for the other.

They stagger toward the center.

Mike throws first.

Forearm!

Bobby rocks backward.

Then answers with a right hand!

Mike staggers.

Forearm!
Right hand!
Forearm!
Right hand!
The crowd reacts to every shot.
John Phillips: "Neither one giving an inch!"
Mike fires again!
Bobby answers!
Mike!
Bobby!
Mike!
Bobby!
Bobby suddenly lands two in a row!
Mike stumbles backward!
Bobby follows!
Another right!
Mike hits the ropes.
Bobby grabs him.
Irish whip!
Mike reverses!
Bobby rebounds—
Mike jumps for the superkick!
Bobby catches the leg!
John Phillips: "Bobby's got him!"
Mike hops on one foot.
Bobby pulls him closer—
SHORT-ARM CLOTHESLINE!
Mike gets turned inside out!
Bobby falls on top!
ONE!
TWO!
THR—
MIKE BEST KICKS OUT!

Bobby doesn't argue.

Doesn't even look at the referee.

He rolls onto his knees.

He knows.

More.

It's going to take more.

Mark Bravo: "Look at Bobby."

John Phillips: "No frustration."

Mark Bravo: "Because he's not surprised anymore."

Bobby gets to his feet.

Mike is still down.

Bobby backs toward the corner.

He looks at Mike.

Then at the opposite turnbuckles.

The crowd begins to realize what he's considering.

John Phillips: "Bobby..."

Bobby starts climbing.

First rope.

Second rope.

Mark Bravo: "This is either going to be spectacular or deeply irresponsible."

Bobby reaches the second turnbuckle.

He looks down at Mike.

Mike hasn't moved.

Bobby climbs one more.

Rocket Arena rises.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean is going all the way up!"

Bobby balances himself.

He looks down.

Takes a breath.

Then jumps.

BOBBY DEAN SPLASH!

MIKE MOVES!

BOOM!

Bobby crashes chest-first into the canvas!

The entire ring shakes!

Mark Bravo: "OH, GOD!"

Bobby bounces from the impact.

Mike rolls toward the ropes.

Both men are down again.

John Phillips: "That may have changed everything!"

Mike grabs the middle rope.

Pulls himself up.

Bobby is on his stomach.

Trying desperately to breathe.

Mike sees him.

His eyes sharpen.

Opportunity.

He limps toward Bobby.

Grabs the arm.

Hooks it.

Mike drops his weight.

FUJIWARA ARMBAR!

Bobby screams!

Mike wrenches backward!

John Phillips: "Mike Best immediately attacks the arm again!"

Bobby reaches toward the ropes.

They're several feet away.

Mike pulls.

Bobby pounds his free fist against the mat.

Again—

Not a tap!

Again!

Mike adjusts.

Bobby tries to roll.

Mike moves with him.

Then transitions.

He releases the arm.
Hooks Bobby's head.
Wraps the body.
GILDED CAGE!
Mike locks in the Koji Clutch!
Bobby's eyes go wide!
Mark Bravo: "GILDED CAGE!"
John Phillips: "Bobby is trapped!"
Mike pulls tighter.
Bobby reaches.
Nothing.
His hand drops.
The referee checks him.
Bobby's hand comes back up!
He refuses.
Mike squeezes harder.
Mike Best: "COME ON!"
Bobby's face is turning red.
He plants his free hand against the canvas.
Pushes.
Nothing.
Again.
His body shifts.
Mike adjusts.
Bobby shifts again.
Inch.
By inch.
By inch.
The crowd starts clapping.
BOB-BY!
BOB-BY!
BOB-BY!
Bobby reaches.

Still too far.

He drags Mike with him.

Mike's eyes widen.

Bobby reaches again.

Fingertips.

Nothing.

Again!

ROPE!

Bobby grabs the bottom rope!

Rocket Arena erupts!

The referee immediately orders the break.

Mike releases.

Immediately.

He rolls away.

Mike sits on the canvas.

Breathing heavily.

He looks at Bobby.

Bobby clutches the rope.

Barely conscious.

John Phillips: "He survived the Gilded Cage!"

Mark Bravo: "That's not the Bobby Dean people laugh at."

Mike hears it.

He nods.

Mark Bravo: "That's the Bobby Dean Mike Best remembered."

Mike gets up.

He walks toward Bobby.

Bobby pulls himself upright.

Mike grabs him.

Bobby suddenly fires a right!

Mike answers!

Bobby!

Mike!

Bobby!

Mike kicks the damaged leg!

Bobby drops to one knee!

Mike grabs him.

German suplex!

Bobby lands hard!

Mike maintains the waistlock!

He pulls Bobby back up.

A second German!

Bobby crashes down!

Mike still doesn't release!

John Phillips: "Mike is chaining them together!"

Mike struggles.

Bobby's weight is enormous.

But Mike forces him up.

A third—

Bobby blocks!

Mike tries again!

Bobby throws an elbow!

Mike takes it!

Another!

Mike releases!

Bobby turns—

RIGHT HAND!

Mike stumbles!

Bobby grabs him!

BELLY-TO-BELLY SUPLEX!

Mike crashes into the canvas!

Bobby collapses.

Again.

Neither man moves.

John Phillips: "What else can these two possibly have left?"

Mark Bravo: "Whatever it is, somebody better find it."

The referee begins counting.

ONE!

No movement.

TWO!

Mike rolls over.

THREE!

Bobby gets an arm beneath himself.

FOUR!

Mike crawls toward the ropes.

FIVE!

Bobby reaches one knee.

SIX!

Mike stands.

SEVEN!

Bobby stands.

The referee stops.

They turn.

Face one another.

The crowd rises.

Mike wipes sweat from his eyes.

Bobby's chest heaves.

Mike looks at him.

A long moment.

Then—

Mike extends his hand.

The crowd reacts.

Bobby looks at it.

John Phillips: "What is this?"

Bobby looks at Mike.

Mike doesn't smile.

Doesn't say anything.

Bobby reaches out.

He takes the hand.

Mike pulls him closer.

Forehead to forehead.

Mike Best: "That's the Bobby I remember."

Bobby breathes heavily.

Bobby Dean: "Yeah?"

Mike nods.

Mike Best: "Yeah."

A beat.

Bobby smiles.

Bobby Dean: "Then beat him."

The crowd erupts.

Mike's expression changes.

The respect remains.

But now...

Cold.

Focused.

Mike releases Bobby's hand.

They back away from one another.

Mark Bravo: "There it is."

John Phillips: "No excuses."

Mark Bravo: "No interference."

John Phillips: "No shortcuts."

Mike raises his hands.

Bobby raises his.

Mark Bravo: "Finish it."

They charge!

Bobby swings!

Mike ducks!

Kick to the knee!

Bobby buckles!

Mike hits the ropes!

Bobby realizes what's coming!

He throws himself sideways!

I KNEED A HERO MISSES AGAIN!

Mike catches himself against the ropes!

Bobby charges!

AVALANCHE!

Mike gets crushed against the turnbuckles!

Bobby backs up.

Charges again!

SECOND AVALANCHE!

Mike drops to a seated position!

Bobby looks down at him.

Then toward the opposite corner.

John Phillips: "Bobby sees it!"

Bobby backs all the way across the ring.

Mike is seated against the bottom turnbuckle.

Bobby charges!

Full speed!

Mike rolls out!

BOOM!

Bobby crashes backside-first into the corner!

Mike scrambles up.

Bobby pulls himself from the turnbuckles.

Mike charges!

HASHTAG MUTED!

The superkick catches Bobby flush!

Bobby falls backward against the ropes!

But the ropes hold him up!

Mike backs away.

Bobby staggers forward.

Mike looks at him.

Bobby is still standing.

Barely.

Mike Best: "Jesus Christ."

Bobby throws a wild right!

Mike ducks!

Kick to the knee!

Bobby drops!

Seated.

In the center of the ring.

Mike sees it.

The crowd sees it.

John Phillips: "NO."

Mike backs into the ropes.

Bobby looks up.

His eyes widen.

Mike explodes forward.

I KNEED A HERO!

CRACK!

THE RUNNING KNEE CONNECTS!

Bobby's body snaps backward!

He collapses flat onto the canvas!

Mike falls beside him!

Rocket Arena explodes!

John Phillips: "I KNEED A HERO!"

Mark Bravo: "HE GOT ALL OF IT!"

Mike crawls toward Bobby.

He reaches him.

Hooks the leg.

The referee drops.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

DING! DING! DING!

The crowd erupts.

Mike Best releases the leg.

He rolls onto his back.

Stares at the ceiling.

Exhausted.

Bobby Dean doesn't move.

John Phillips: "Mike Best advances!"

Mark Bravo: "And I KNEED A HERO remains exactly what it's always been."

John Phillips: "Nobody kicks out."

Mike slowly sits up.

The referee approaches.

Raises his arm.

Ring Announcer: "Here is your winner... advancing to the second round of the Ring King Tournament... MIIIIKE... BEST!"

Mike's arm stays raised.

But he isn't celebrating.

Not yet.

He's looking at Bobby.

The referee releases Mike's hand.

Mike gets to his feet.

Slowly.

His music begins.

He immediately motions for it to stop.

The music cuts.

John Phillips: "What's Mike doing?"

Mike walks toward Bobby.

The referee instinctively steps between them.

Mike waves him away.

No aggression.

Mike crouches beside Bobby.

Bobby is starting to stir.

Mike says something quietly.

We don't hear it.

Then he reaches out.

Offers Bobby his hand.

Bobby looks at it.

Then at Mike.

Bobby takes it.

Mike pulls.

Bobby gets to one knee.

Then his feet.

The crowd applauds.

Mike and Bobby stand face-to-face.

Mike nods.

Once.

Bobby nods back.

Mike raises Bobby's arm.

Rocket Arena erupts.

John Phillips: "How about that?"

Mark Bravo: "Mike Best won the match."

A beat.

Mark Bravo: "Bobby Dean won something too."

Mike releases Bobby's arm.

He walks toward the ropes.

Then stops.

Turns back.

Mike Best: "Don't lose that again."

Bobby looks at him.

He understands.

Mike isn't talking about the match.

Mike steps through the ropes.

Drops to the floor.

His music starts again.

Mike begins walking up the ramp.

John Phillips: "Mike Best came into this match wanting to find out whether the Bobby Dean he remembered still existed."

Bobby remains in the ring.

The International Championship is handed back to him.

He takes it.

Looks down at it.

John Phillips: "He found his answer."

Mike reaches the stage.

He turns around.

Looks back toward the ring.

Bobby raises the International Championship onto his shoulder.

Mike gives him one final nod.

Then disappears through the curtain.

Mark Bravo: "But there's no consolation prize in Ring King."

A tournament graphic begins filling the screen.

Mark Bravo: "Mike Best came here to win the tournament."

The eight remaining names appear.

SOL AZTECA

BIANCA PAGE

SAMUEL SCYTHE

MIKEY UNLIKELY

KIRSTY McKINNEY

MAXWELL JETT

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO

MIKE BEST

John Phillips: "Sixteen became eight."

The tournament bracket completes itself.

John Phillips: "Round One is over."

Cut back to Bobby.

He sits against the bottom turnbuckle.

The International Championship rests across his lap.

He's disappointed.

There's no hiding that.

But the crowd continues applauding him.

Bobby looks around Rocket Arena.

Slowly.

Then down at the championship.

September twenty-sixth is still waiting for him.

And so is Eric Dane Jr.

Mark Bravo: "Bobby Dean's road through Ring King ends tonight."

A beat.

Mark Bravo: "But Bobby Dean's road to Ring King?"

The camera tightens on the International Championship.

Mark Bravo: "That's another story."

Bobby grips the title.

The crowd continues chanting.

BOB-BY!

BOB-BY!

BOB-BY!

Bobby looks toward the entranceway.

A tired smile appears.

Then he raises the International Championship.

The crowd cheers.

John Phillips: "Mike Best is going to Round Two."

Mark Bravo: "And after tonight, nobody gets to call Bobby Dean a joke without remembering this match."

The final shot holds on Bobby Dean beneath the lights.

International Championship raised above his head.

Then—

Fade to black.

Conclusion

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Show Credits

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