

Road to the Throne: 09.11.2026

Promotion: United Toughness Alliance
Date: September 11, 2026
Location: Madison Square Garden — New York City, New York

Preview

The United Toughness Alliance honors the City of New York and the country on the 25th anniversary of September 11th in this very special, patriotic, edition of UTA action that will see the second round of the Ring King tournament conclude.

Results

Cold Open

Segment

Black.

No UTA logo.

No music.

No opening video.

For several seconds, there is simply silence.

Then white lettering slowly fades onto the screen.

SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

25 YEARS LATER

The words remain.

Then slowly fade away.

We open on New York City.

Not archival footage of destruction. Not images of the attacks.

New York as it stands tonight.

The skyline.

The lights reflecting across the water.

An American flag hanging from the side of a building.

Firefighters standing outside a station house.

Police officers walking beneath the lights of Manhattan.

People moving through the city streets.

Flowers left in remembrance.

A hand resting against a name at the September 11 Memorial.

The camera lingers.

A quiet instrumental score begins underneath the images.

Nothing triumphant.

Nothing designed to manufacture emotion.

Just quiet piano beneath the city.

A narrator speaks.

NARRATOR: "Twenty-five years ago today, a morning began like countless mornings before it."

Morning sunlight between Manhattan buildings.

NARRATOR: "People went to work."

A subway rolls through a station.

NARRATOR: "Parents said goodbye to their children."

Families walking together through the city.

NARRATOR: "First responders reported for another day of service."

A firehouse door. Helmets. An American flag.

NARRATOR: "And thousands of people began an ordinary Tuesday without knowing that September 11, 2001 would become a day the world would never forget."

The screen fades briefly to black.

When the picture returns, we see the reflecting pools of the National September 11 Memorial.

NARRATOR: "Nearly three thousand lives were taken."

NARRATOR: "Families were changed forever."

NARRATOR: "And in the hours, days, months and years that followed, countless others carried the physical and emotional consequences of that day with them."

Flowers rest beside engraved names.

NARRATOR: "But September 11 is remembered for more than what was taken."

A firefighter stands outside a New York City firehouse.

Then another shot: an American flag moving gently above a Manhattan street.

NARRATOR: "We remember those who ran toward danger when every instinct told others to run away."

NARRATOR: "Firefighters."

NARRATOR: "Police officers."

NARRATOR: "Paramedics."

NARRATOR: "Emergency workers."

NARRATOR: "Ordinary people who became extraordinary because someone beside them needed help."

The music remains quiet.

We see New Yorkers walking together beneath the evening lights.

NARRATOR: "We remember the survivors."

NARRATOR: "We remember those who spent years searching, recovering, rebuilding and healing."

NARRATOR: "We remember the families who have carried empty spaces at tables, missing voices on birthdays, and memories of loved ones for twenty-five years."

Another shot of the Memorial.

NARRATOR: "And above all..."

A pause.

NARRATOR: "...we remember their names."

The music fades.

Silence again.

For the first time tonight, we enter Madison Square Garden.

There is no pyro.

No entrance music.

No Ring King graphics.

The arena is dark except for thousands of small lights throughout the stands and a soft illumination over the ring.

The entire UTA roster stands silently along the entrance stage.

There are no factions separated for the camera.

No championship belts prominently displayed.

No characters playing to the audience.

Tonight, for this moment, they simply stand together.

The camera slowly moves across Madison Square Garden.

Fans stand.

Some hold American flags.

Some embrace.

Others simply bow their heads.

In the center of the ring stands a single microphone.

A voice comes over the public address system.

RING ANNOUNCER: "Ladies and gentlemen..."

The Garden becomes completely still.

RING ANNOUNCER: "On September 11, 2001, 2,977 innocent people lost their lives in the terrorist attacks against our nation."

RING ANNOUNCER: "Tonight, twenty-five years later, here in the heart of New York City, the United Toughness Alliance asks everyone inside Madison Square Garden, and everyone watching around the world, to join us in remembering those we lost..."

RING ANNOUNCER: "...the families who carry their memory..."

RING ANNOUNCER: "...the survivors..."

RING ANNOUNCER: "...and the first responders whose courage continues to inspire generations."

A pause.

RING ANNOUNCER: "Please join us for a moment of silence."

Silence.

The camera does not hunt for reactions.

It does not cut rapidly through the crowd.

Instead, one wide shot holds Madison Square Garden.

Thousands of people standing together.

The UTA roster standing together.

The ring sitting quietly beneath a single light.

And for several long seconds...

nothing.

The moment of silence concludes.

A lone bell sounds.

DING.

Ten seconds.

DING.

Ten more.

DING.

The final toll disappears into the silence of Madison Square Garden.

The screen slowly fades to black.

IN MEMORY OF THOSE WE LOST

September 11, 2001

A beat.

WE REMEMBER.

Fade to black.

Several seconds pass before anything else appears.

Then—

The UTA logo slowly emerges from the darkness.

The sound of Madison Square Garden begins rising underneath it.

The solemnity of the opening is allowed to remain behind us as the atmosphere gradually changes.

Tonight, the United Toughness Alliance is in New York City.

And when we return to Madison Square Garden, the road to the throne continues.

Introduction

Segment

Black screen.

For one final moment, silence.

Then a low pulse begins.

Not quite music at first.

More like a heartbeat.

One.

Two.

Three.

Then the first image hits.

16.

A rapid montage of the original Ring King field flashes across the screen.

Chris Ross.

Samuel Scythe.

Bobby Dean.

Mikey Unlikely.

Emily Hightower.

Hakuryu.

Then the ten qualifiers.

Kirsty McKinney.

Bianca Page.

Lindsey Lothario.

Mike Best.

Maxwell Jett.

Selina Santorino.

Sol Azteca.

Yoshii.

Madman Szalinski.

Marie Van Claudio.

NARRATOR: "Sixteen entered."

The music builds.

Now the footage comes faster.

Sol Azteca driving Selina Santorino down.

Bianca Page surviving Lindsey Lothario.

Samuel Scythe brutalizing Madman Szalinski.

Mikey Unlikely watching Chris Ross get counted out.

Kirsty McKinney capitalizing as Hakuryu struggles through powder-blinded eyes.

Maxwell Jett taking advantage of Emily Hightower's distraction.

Marie Van Claudio standing victorious over Maxx Mayhem.

Mike Best exploding forward with I KNEED A HERO!

NARRATOR: "Eight survived."

8.

The number fills the screen.

Then Atlanta.

Bianca Page attacking Sol Azteca's leg.

Sol fighting back.

Emily Hightower appearing at ringside.

The forearm.

Bianca being rolled back inside.

Corona Strike.

Luz Final.

Bianca tapping.

SOL AZTECA — SEMIFINALIST.

Cut.

Samuel Scythe crushing Mikey Unlikely with overwhelming offense.

Mikey escaping.

Scythe driving through him again.

Reaper's Blade.

Touch of Death.

Mikey somehow surviving.

Scythe colliding with Ace Andrews on the apron.

Mikey slipping free of Elysian Gift.

The inside cradle.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

MIKEY UNLIKELY — SEMIFINALIST.

The music briefly drops out.

Black.

4.

A beat.

NARRATOR: "But there are still two places left."

The beat crashes back in.

Kirsty McKinney appears on screen.

Her upset of Hakuryu.

Her hand raised.

Her expression changing from disbelief to realization.

Cut to Maxwell Jett.

Smirking.

Relaxed.

Completely unimpressed.

MAXWELL JETT: "It's a cute story."

Kirsty walking through a curtain backstage.

MAXWELL JETT: "Everybody loves Cinderella."

Maxwell adjusts his jacket.

MAXWELL JETT: "Right up until midnight."

Quick cut.

KIRSTY MCKINNEY

VS.

MAXWELL JETT

RING KING — ROUND TWO

Cut to Marie Van Claudio.

The Empire behind her.

Marie raises her chin and looks directly into the camera.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Ring King?"

She smiles.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "No."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Ring Queen."

Cut to Mike Best.

Hall of Fame ring catching the light.

Mike standing alone.

MIKE BEST: "I'm the Son of GOD."

Bobby Dean falling after I KNEED A HERO!

MIKE BEST: "I'm a Hall of Famer."

Mike helping Bobby back to his feet.

MIKE BEST: "I'm Mike Best."

Cut.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO

VS.

MIKE BEST

FIRST TIME EVER

RING KING — ROUND TWO

Now all four remaining quarterfinalists flash across the screen in rapid succession.

Kirsty.

Maxwell.

Marie.

Mike.

NARRATOR: "Tonight..."

Sol Azteca.

Mikey Unlikely.

NARRATOR: "...they find out who joins them."

The Crypto.com Arena appears briefly beneath a massive Ring King graphic.

RING KING 2026

SEPTEMBER 26

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

NARRATOR: "Two weeks from now..."

A crown slowly rotates against darkness.

NARRATOR: "...four will remain."

NARRATOR: "Three will fall."

NARRATOR: "One will take the throne."

The crown stops.

NARRATOR: "But first..."

Madison Square Garden explodes onto the screen.

The lights are fully up now.

The crowd is on its feet.

UTA banners hang throughout the building.

The camera sweeps across the packed stands as the energy that had been deliberately restrained during the cold open is finally released.

NARRATOR: "...eight become four."

The UTA Road to the Throne logo slams onto the screen.

UTA ROAD TO THE THRONE

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN

NEW YORK CITY

Pyro finally erupts from the stage.

The Garden roars.

We sweep across the crowd before cutting down to ringside.

MARK BRAVO: "Twenty-five years after a day this city, this country and this world will never forget, the United Toughness Alliance is live from Madison Square Garden in New York City."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And after beginning tonight by remembering those we lost, we now turn to what this building has hosted for generations — competition on the biggest possible stage."

MARK BRAVO: "Because tonight, John, the road gets very narrow."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Sixteen started this tournament. Eight made it through the opening round. Sol Azteca and Mikey Unlikely punched their tickets to the Final Four last week in Atlanta."

MARK BRAVO: "Which means there are only two chairs left at the table."

A graphic appears on screen.

RING KING 2026 — SEMIFINALISTS

SOL AZTECA — ADVANCED

MIKEY UNLIKELY — ADVANCED

KIRSTY MCKINNEY / MAXWELL JETT — TONIGHT

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO / MIKE BEST — TONIGHT

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Kirsty McKinney or Maxwell Jett will claim one."

MARK BRAVO: "Marie Van Claudio or Mike Best will claim the other."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And when this night is over, Mark, there won't be eight names left."

MARK BRAVO: "There will be four."

The graphic shifts.

RING KING 2026

SEPTEMBER 26 — LOS ANGELES

FINAL FOUR COMPLETE TONIGHT

MARK BRAVO: "The crown is close enough now that every wrestler left can see it."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And at Madison Square Garden, somebody's dream ends tonight."

MARK BRAVO: "Welcome to Road to the Throne."

The camera pulls back into a huge wide shot of Madison Square Garden as the crowd roars.

The Clock Runs Out

Segment

We cut backstage inside Madison Square Garden.

The door to the First Class locker room is already open, and inside there is considerably less urgency than one might expect from a man who is one victory away from the Ring King Final Four.

Maxwell Jett sits comfortably on a bench, leaning back against the lockers as he scrolls through his phone.

Jacoby Jacobs stands nearby, already dressed for the evening, while Darian Darrington paces several feet away.

Maxwell scrolls.

And scrolls.

And scrolls.

DARIAN DARRINGTON: "You know you actually have to wrestle tonight, right?"

Maxwell doesn't look up.

MAXWELL JETT: "Do I?"

DARIAN DARRINGTON: "Generally how tournaments work."

MAXWELL JETT: "I thought maybe Kirsty saw the bracket, realized who was waiting for her and saved everybody the trouble."

Jacoby gives Maxwell a look.

JACOBY JACOBS: "She's still here."

Maxwell finally lowers the phone.

MAXWELL JETT: "Good for her."

He sets it beside him.

MAXWELL JETT: "Seriously. Good for Kirsty McKinney."

Maxwell actually applauds.

Three slow, patronizing claps.

MAXWELL JETT: "What a story."

MAXWELL JETT: "She qualified."

Clap.

MAXWELL JETT: "She made it into Ring King."

Clap.

MAXWELL JETT: "Then she stood in the right place while Hakuryu's own idiot blinded him."

Clap.

MAXWELL JETT: "And now Kirsty McKinney is in the final eight."

Maxwell spreads his arms.

MAXWELL JETT: "Inspirational."

JACOBY JACOBS: "She still beat him."

That earns Jacoby a slow turn of Maxwell's head.

MAXWELL JETT: "Did she?"

JACOBY JACOBS: "Her hand went up."

MAXWELL JETT: "Because Sinja threw powder into the wrong face."

JACOBY JACOBS: "And she capitalized."

MAXWELL JETT: "Which makes her opportunistic."

Maxwell gets to his feet.

MAXWELL JETT: "It doesn't make her me."

Darian stops pacing.

DARIAN DARRINGTON: "Max..."

Maxwell looks toward him.

DARIAN DARRINGTON: "Chris Ross is out."

That gets his attention.

DARIAN DARRINGTON: "Samuel Scythe is out."

DARIAN DARRINGTON: "Hakuryu is out."

DARIAN DARRINGTON: "Emily Hightower is out."

DARIAN DARRINGTON: "Bobby Dean is out."

DARIAN DARRINGTON: "There are a lot of people who walked into this thing thinking somebody else couldn't beat them."

For the first time, Maxwell's expression becomes slightly more serious.

He considers the list.

Then a smile slowly returns.

MAXWELL JETT: "Good."

Darian raises an eyebrow.

MAXWELL JETT: "Makes the crown look better on me."

Jacoby exhales through his nose.

JACOBY JACOBS: "That's what you took from that?"

MAXWELL JETT: "That's exactly what I took from that."

Maxwell walks toward a mirror and adjusts the collar of his shirt.

MAXWELL JETT: "Look at who's gone."

MAXWELL JETT: "Champions."

MAXWELL JETT: "Hall of Fame caliber talent."

MAXWELL JETT: "People everybody thought would still be standing when we got to Los Angeles."

He looks at himself in the mirror.

MAXWELL JETT: "And I'm still here."

MAXWELL JETT: "That's not a warning, gentlemen."

He turns around.

MAXWELL JETT: "That's confirmation."

A beat.

Jacoby and Darian exchange a glance.

Jacoby finally asks the question.

JACOBY JACOBS: "You sure about him?"

Maxwell's expression changes immediately.

Not surprise.

Not concern.

Annoyance that they're having this conversation again.

MAXWELL JETT: "I told you."

Maxwell shakes his head.

MAXWELL JETT: "Not tonight."

DARIAN DARRINGTON: "We're just making sure."

MAXWELL JETT: "And I'm sure."

Maxwell steps between them.

MAXWELL JETT: "You don't call in the cavalry because Cinderella made it past midnight once."

He pats Jacoby on the shoulder.

MAXWELL JETT: "He's not needed."

Then Darian.

MAXWELL JETT: "Not for this."

Maxwell starts toward the door.

JACOBY JACOBS: "And if you're wrong?"

Maxwell stops.

He doesn't turn around immediately.

Then he glances back over his shoulder.

MAXWELL JETT: "I'm not."

He steps into the hallway.

Jacoby and Darian follow.

MAXWELL JETT: "Kirsty's had a great little run."

Maxwell adjusts his cuffs as he walks.

MAXWELL JETT: "She got her upset."

MAXWELL JETT: "She got people talking."

MAXWELL JETT: "She even got herself a match at Madison Square Garden."

Maxwell stops and looks directly into the camera.

MAXWELL JETT: "That's the problem with Cinderella stories."

A grin.

MAXWELL JETT: "Eventually..."

Maxwell snaps his fingers.

MAXWELL JETT: "...the clock runs out."

He starts walking again.

MAXWELL JETT: "Tonight, Madison Square Garden gets the ending."

First Class disappears down the corridor as we cut away.

Find the Weakness

Segment

Backstage at Madison Square Garden, we find The Creed Method in a quiet training area away from the main locker room.

No celebration.

No discussion of Madison Square Garden.

Just work.

Lindsey Lothario drives a sharp low kick into a training pad held by Kairo Bey.

THWACK!

ELI CREED: "Again."

THWACK!

ELI CREED: "Again."

THWACK!

ELI CREED: "Reset."

Lindsey immediately steps away.

Hands up.

Breathing controlled.

No wasted movement.

Eli Creed watches closely from several feet away.

ELI CREED: "Better."

Lindsey allows the smallest hint of a smile.

ELI CREED: "Don't."

The smile disappears.

LINDSEY LOTHARIO: "Don't what?"

ELI CREED: "That."

LINDSEY LOTHARIO: "Smile?"

ELI CREED: "Get satisfied."

Eli steps closer.

ELI CREED: "You beat Selina Santorino."

LINDSEY LOTHARIO: "I know."

ELI CREED: "And?"

Lindsey thinks about it.

LINDSEY LOTHARIO: "And I beat her."

ELI CREED: "That's the result."

Eli points toward Lindsey's feet.

ELI CREED: "I'm asking about the work."

Lindsey's expression changes.

ELI CREED: "Second exchange. You chased."

Lindsey nods.

ELI CREED: "She got frustrated. She backed away. She wanted you angry enough to follow her."

LINDSEY LOTHARIO: "I followed."

ELI CREED: "Three steps."

LINDSEY LOTHARIO: "Three steps."

ELI CREED: "Why?"

LINDSEY LOTHARIO: "Because I wanted to hit her."

ELI CREED: "Exactly."

Eli taps two fingers against Lindsey's chest.

ELI CREED: "She made this decide what these were doing."

He points toward Lindsey's feet.

ELI CREED: "That's backwards."

LINDSEY LOTHARIO: "But I caught myself."

ELI CREED: "You did."

LINDSEY LOTHARIO: "Reset."

ELI CREED: "You did."

LINDSEY LOTHARIO: "And won."

Eli stares at them.

Then finally nods.

ELI CREED: "You did."

That smile threatens to return.

ELI CREED: "Still chased."

LINDSEY LOTHARIO: "You're impossible."

ELI CREED: "That's why you're getting better."

Kairo lowers the training pad.

KAIRO BEY: "Can I smile?"

Eli slowly turns toward him.

KAIRO BEY: "Never mind."

Lindsey laughs under their breath.

Eli reaches out and takes the training pad from Kairo.

ELI CREED: "Your turn."

Kairo's demeanor immediately changes.

He rolls his shoulders once.

Especially the one that has kept him from being completely healthy in recent weeks.

Eli notices.

ELI CREED: "How is it?"

KAIRO BEY: "Good."

ELI CREED: "That's not what I asked."

KAIRO BEY: "Healthy."

ELI CREED: "One hundred percent?"

Kairo pauses.

KAIRO BEY: "Close enough."

Eli immediately drops the pad.

ELI CREED: "Wrong answer."

Kairo looks at him.

KAIRO BEY: "Eli—"

ELI CREED: "I don't need tough."

Eli steps closer.

ELI CREED: "I need honest."

ELI CREED: "If it's injured, we protect it."

ELI CREED: "If it's weak, we strengthen it."

ELI CREED: "If you're afraid to use it, we fix that too."

Kairo looks down at the shoulder.

He rotates it carefully.

KAIRO BEY: "It's healthy."

A beat.

KAIRO BEY: "I'm still thinking about it."

Eli nods.

ELI CREED: "There we go."

He picks the pad back up.

ELI CREED: "That's something we can work with."

Kairo steps into position.

ELI CREED: "You've had plenty of time to watch."

KAIRO BEY: "I've been paying attention."

ELI CREED: "Then you've watched Lindsey change."

Kairo glances toward them.

KAIRO BEY: "Yeah."

ELI CREED: "Not because they suddenly learned how to wrestle."

ELI CREED: "Lindsey could always wrestle."

Lindsey listens.

ELI CREED: "But talent without discipline gets emotional."

ELI CREED: "Emotion gets impatient."

ELI CREED: "Impatience makes mistakes."

Eli raises the pad.

ELI CREED: "We're removing mistakes."

KAIRO BEY: "One at a time."

ELI CREED: "Exactly."

Kairo squares himself.

ELI CREED: "Low kick."

THWACK!

ELI CREED: "Reset."

Kairo backs away.

ELI CREED: "Again."

THWACK!

ELI CREED: "Reset."

Kairo backs away again.

ELI CREED: "Again."

THWACK!

Kairo starts to move forward.

ELI CREED: "STOP."

Kairo freezes.

ELI CREED: "What did you do?"

KAIRO BEY: "Followed."

ELI CREED: "Why?"

KAIRO BEY: "Felt like I had you."

ELI CREED: "Feeling isn't knowing."

Eli points to the spot where Kairo started.

ELI CREED: "Again."

Kairo returns to position.

Lindsey watches him now with a knowing grin.

KAIRO BEY: "Don't."

LINDSEY LOTHARIO: "Don't what?"

KAIRO BEY: "That."

LINDSEY LOTHARIO: "Smile?"

KAIRO BEY: "Get satisfied."

Lindsey laughs.

Even Eli almost cracks.

Almost.

ELI CREED: "Enough."

The two immediately refocus.

ELI CREED: "Kairo."

Kairo looks at him.

ELI CREED: "Tonight isn't about proving the shoulder works."

KAIRO BEY: "Then what am I proving?"

ELI CREED: "That this works."

Eli taps his temple.

ELI CREED: "Anybody can come back from an injury and throw harder."

ELI CREED: "You're going to come back smarter."

Kairo nods.

ELI CREED: "You don't chase."

ELI CREED: "You don't force."

ELI CREED: "You don't fight their fight because your ego tells you that you can win it."

ELI CREED: "You find the weakness."

Eli raises one finger.

ELI CREED: "Break."

A second.

ELI CREED: "Bend."

A third.

ELI CREED: "Build."

Lindsey steps alongside Kairo.

LINDSEY LOTHARIO: "Break."

KAIRO BEY: "Bend."

ELI CREED: "Build."

Eli tosses the training pad aside.

ELI CREED: "Now let's see if you can do it when somebody's hitting back."

Kairo rolls his neck and starts toward the arena.

Lindsey falls into step beside him.

Eli follows several paces behind, watching both of his students.

The lesson is over.

The test is next.

#JusticeForSelina

Segment

The broadcast returns from a brief UTA graphic.

Instead of cutting backstage or returning immediately to ringside, the screen shifts into a vertical-video layout.

The sides of the broadcast blur softly around the image.

At the top of the screen:

@SELINASANTORINO

Below it:

14.8M FOLLOWERS

A red LIVE-style indicator pulses in the corner.

Selina Santorino appears on screen.

Perfect lighting.

Perfect makeup.

Perfect framing.

Not a hair out of place.

Whatever frustration existed after her loss last week has been completely edited out.

She looks calm.

Concerned, even.

Which somehow makes this worse.

SELINA SANTORINO: "Influencies."

Selina pauses.

SELINA SANTORINO: "We need to talk."

A somber musical sting begins underneath the video.

Far too dramatic for professional wrestling.

SELINA SANTORINO: "Normally, I don't like giving negativity engagement."

She gives the camera a sympathetic little smile.

SELINA SANTORINO: "Hate me. Love me. It's all the same."

SELINA SANTORINO: "But what has been happening to me in UTA has gone beyond hate comments."

Selina lowers her voice.

SELINA SANTORINO: "It's gone beyond jealousy."

A beat.

SELINA SANTORINO: "At this point..."

She looks directly into the lens.

SELINA SANTORINO: "...we need to start asking questions."

SMASH CUT.

TEXT ON SCREEN:

THEY DON'T WANT YOU TO SEE THIS.

The footage changes.

We see Selina's Ring King first-round match against Sol Azteca.

But not the whole exchange.

Not even close.

The footage begins with Selina already on the defensive.

It freezes.

A red circle appears around the referee.

Then another red circle appears around Sol.

A giant red arrow connects the two.

TEXT ON SCREEN:

WHY IS THE REFEREE WATCHING SELINA?

The video zooms in so aggressively that the image begins to pixelate.

SELINA SANTORINO (V.O.): "Interesting."

The clip advances three seconds.

Selina gets caught by Sol.

Freeze frame.

SELINA SANTORINO (V.O.): "Notice anything?"

Another graphic appears.

0 WARNINGS FOR SOL

CONVENIENT?

The footage ends before any surrounding context can explain what we're supposed to be noticing.

Back to Selina.

SELINA SANTORINO: "Now, I'm not accusing anyone of anything."

She holds up both hands.

SELINA SANTORINO: "Because unlike certain people, I believe in evidence."

SMASH CUT.

Scott Stevens appears on screen.

This is footage from immediately after Selina's Ring King elimination.

SCOTT STEVENS: "You had your chance."

CUT.

SCOTT STEVENS: "You blew it."

CUT.

SCOTT STEVENS: "You're not."

CUT.

SCOTT STEVENS: "That's Ring King."

The video abruptly cuts to black.

TEXT ON SCREEN:

UTA GENERAL MANAGER SCOTT STEVENS

ON SELINA SANTORINO

Back to Selina.

Her expression is wounded.

Beautifully, professionally wounded.

SELINA SANTORINO: "Did you hear that?"

She shakes her head slowly.

SELINA SANTORINO: "Not 'we'll review what happened.'"

SELINA SANTORINO: "Not 'we'll look at the footage.'"

SELINA SANTORINO: "Not even 'Selina, you're our most valuable digital asset, let's make sure our billion-dollar star was treated fairly.'"

She leans closer.

SELINA SANTORINO: "No."

SELINA SANTORINO: "He had already decided."

Another dramatic transition.

TEXT ON SCREEN:

ONE WEEK LATER...

Footage begins from Selina's match with Lindsey Lothario.

Only now the footage is slowed to roughly twenty-five percent speed.

Eli Creed is visible outside the ring.

A giant flashing arrow appears over him.

TEXT:

WHY IS HE HERE?

Another freeze frame.

Kairo Bey is visible nearby.

A second arrow.

TEXT:

AND HIM?

Another freeze frame.

Lindsey stands inside the ring.

A third arrow.

TEXT:

THREE AGAINST ONE?

Back to Selina.

SELINA SANTORINO: "I just think it's important that people see the environment I was expected to compete in."

The next clip shows Selina going after Kairo's recently injured shoulder.

But the footage begins half a second late.

All the audience sees is Kairo putting his hands on Selina in response.

FREEZE FRAME.

The image turns black and white except for Kairo, highlighted in red.

TEXT:

UTA WRESTLER PUTS HANDS ON SELINA.

Underneath:

NO DISQUALIFICATION.

NO SUSPENSION.

NO CONSEQUENCES.

The clip restarts.

Kairo's contact plays again.

Slower.

Then again.

Even slower.

Then from a zoomed-in angle.

SELINA SANTORINO (V.O.): "I'm six feet tall."

SELINA SANTORINO (V.O.): "I can defend myself."

SELINA SANTORINO (V.O.): "But that's not the point."

Cut back to Selina.

SELINA SANTORINO: "The point is that rules apparently change depending on who they're being applied to."

She stares solemnly into the camera.

SELINA SANTORINO: "And apparently..."

A beat.

SELINA SANTORINO: "...they don't apply when the victim is me."

Another clip.

Scott Stevens from last week.

SCOTT STEVENS: "You lost to Sol."

CUT.

SCOTT STEVENS: "You lost again."

CUT.

SCOTT STEVENS: "UTA isn't the problem."

CUT.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Start winning."

Silence.

The screen fades slowly back to Selina.

This time there is no music.

She lets several seconds pass.

SELINA SANTORINO: "Start winning."

She gives a tiny laugh.

SELINA SANTORINO: "That's what the General Manager of the United Toughness Alliance told me."

SELINA SANTORINO: "After questionable officiating."

SELINA SANTORINO: "After outside involvement."

SELINA SANTORINO: "After members of the Creed Method were allowed to surround my match."

SELINA SANTORINO: "After Kairo Bey physically involved himself."

She tilts her head.

SELINA SANTORINO: "His solution?"

Another small shrug.

SELINA SANTORINO: "Blame Selina."

A graphic suddenly flashes behind her.

#JUSTICEFORSelina

Then it corrects itself almost instantly into:

#JusticeForSelina

Selina's demeanor brightens slightly.

SELINA SANTORINO: "So I'm asking my Influencies to do what UTA apparently won't."

SELINA SANTORINO: "Pay attention."

SELINA SANTORINO: "Save the clips."

SELINA SANTORINO: "Repost them."

SELINA SANTORINO: "Ask questions."

The hashtag multiplies across the screen.

#JusticeForSelina

#JusticeForSelina

#JusticeForSelina

SELINA SANTORINO: "Because they can control the matches."

SELINA SANTORINO: "They can control the officials."

SELINA SANTORINO: "They can control who gets opportunities."

Selina points toward the camera.

SELINA SANTORINO: "But they don't control the algorithm."

Her familiar smile finally appears.

SELINA SANTORINO: "And the algorithm..."

She leans closer.

SELINA SANTORINO: "...doesn't lie."

Selina blows a kiss toward the camera.

SELINA SANTORINO: "Ciao."

The video cuts.

For a moment, we're left with a black screen.

Then a final graphic appears:

#JusticeForSelina

Underneath it is a rapidly climbing view counter.

284,113

317,882

401,006

527,491

Then we abruptly return live to Madison Square Garden.

The crowd is reacting with a mixture of boos and laughter.

MARK BRAVO: "Oh, come on."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "That's certainly one way to edit the last three weeks."

MARK BRAVO: "One way? John, we watched those matches. That's not what happened."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "We did."

A beat.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "But somebody watching a twenty-second clip on their phone didn't."

Bravo pauses.

MARK BRAVO: "And that's the part I don't like."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Because Selina doesn't have to convince everyone."

MARK BRAVO: "Just enough people."

The broadcast briefly displays the hashtag again in the corner of the screen.

#JusticeForSelina

The number beside it continues climbing.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Ridiculous or not, people are watching."

MARK BRAVO: "And somewhere, Selina Santorino is probably calling that proof."

The hashtag disappears as the broadcast moves on.

Winning

Segment

The broadcast cuts backstage.

Katy Winters stands in the interview area with a microphone in hand.

Beside her is Kirsty McKinney.

Kirsty is already dressed to compete.

No elaborate warm-up routine.

No pacing.

She stands with her arms loosely folded, looking somewhere between focused and mildly inconvenienced by the entire concept of being interviewed.

KATY WINTERS: "Kirsty, in just a few moments you face Maxwell Jett in the second round of the Ring King tournament."

Kirsty nods once.

KATY WINTERS: "A win tonight puts you into the final four."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Yeah."

Katy waits.

Kirsty looks at her.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Was there a question after that?"

KATY WINTERS: "There was going to be."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Okay. Sorry."

A beat.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Continue."

KATY WINTERS: "Maxwell Jett has spent the last week dismissing your run through this tournament as a Cinderella story."

Kirsty's eyes roll almost automatically.

KATY WINTERS: "He says you've been fortunate."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Of course he does."

KATY WINTERS: "And specifically, he points to what happened against Hakuryu."

That gets a slightly different reaction.

Kirsty uncrosses her arms.

KATY WINTERS: "Sinja accidentally blinded Hakuryu with powder. Jed Dye rolled him back into the ring. You took advantage and won."

KATY WINTERS: "Do you understand why some people would say there should be an asterisk beside that victory?"

Kirsty stares at Katy.

Then exhales through her nose.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Sure."

Katy looks mildly surprised.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "I mean, if we're being accurate about it, yeah."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Hakuryu got powder thrown in his face."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "By his own guy."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Which was very funny."

Katy fights a smile.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Then Jed Dye shoved him back in the ring."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Also pretty funny."

Kirsty shrugs.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "And then I pinned him."

KATY WINTERS: "So you don't deny circumstance played a role."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Why would I?"

She looks genuinely confused by the premise.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "I didn't throw the powder."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "I didn't ask Sinja to screw up."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "I didn't tell Jed Dye to come down there."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "And I definitely didn't tell Hakuryu to climb back into the ring blind."

She pauses.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "What I did was recognize that somebody was suddenly in a very bad position."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "And then I beat them."

Another shrug.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "That's wrestling."

KATY WINTERS: "Professional wrestling."

Kirsty gives her a look.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Let's not ruin the moment."

Katy smiles.

KATY WINTERS: "Fair enough."

Kirsty folds her arms again.

KATY WINTERS: "But Maxwell's argument is that without that mistake, you might not be standing here tonight."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Maybe."

Katy raises an eyebrow.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "What?"

KATY WINTERS: "I expected you to disagree."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Why?"

Kirsty shifts her weight slightly.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Maybe Hakuryu beats me."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Maybe I beat him anyway."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Maybe we wrestle for forty minutes and both of us leave hating our knees."

She tilts her head.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "We don't know."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Because that's not the match that happened."

Her expression sharpens slightly.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "The match that happened ended with my hand going up."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "And now I'm here."

Katy nods.

KATY WINTERS: "And here is Madison Square Garden."

Kirsty's eyes briefly drift toward the direction of the arena.

KATY WINTERS: "One victory away from the final four of Ring King."

KATY WINTERS: "Does that mean anything different to you?"

Kirsty thinks about it.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Madison Square Garden's cool."

Katy smiles.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Don't make a big deal out of me admitting that."

KATY WINTERS: "Wouldn't dream of it."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Good."

A brief pause.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "And yeah."

She glances back toward the arena.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Final four matters."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Winning Ring King matters."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Getting a guaranteed shot at the UTA Championship matters."

Her attention returns to Katy.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "That's the part of professional wrestling I've never had a problem understanding."

KATY WINTERS: "Winning."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Exactly."

A tiny smile appears.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "All the entrances and speeches and costumes and fireworks are whatever."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "But eventually somebody rings a bell."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "And then somebody has to actually wrestle me."

That smile disappears almost as quickly as it arrived.

KATY WINTERS: "Tonight that somebody is a former UTA Champion."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Yep."

KATY WINTERS: "Maxwell Jett."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Still yep."

KATY WINTERS: "One of the most successful wrestlers in UTA."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Katy."

Katy stops.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "I know who Maxwell Jett is."

A beat.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "He's really good."

Kirsty says it without sarcasm.

That almost makes the statement more significant.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "He's smart."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "He's experienced."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "He's been champion."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "And he probably thinks I've spent all week offended because he called me Cinderella."

Kirsty rolls her eyes.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "I'm twenty-seven years old."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "If a grown man wants to call me a Disney princess, that's his business."

Katy has to turn her head for a second to hide a laugh.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "My business is figuring out how to put his shoulders on the mat."

Now Kirsty looks directly into the camera.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "And Maxwell?"

She pauses.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "You keep talking about clocks."

A small shrug.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "I'm a wrestler."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "I watch shoulders."

Kirsty turns back toward Katy.

KATY WINTERS: "Kirsty McKinney, thank you."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Sure."

Kirsty starts to leave.

She makes it two steps before stopping.

She looks back.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Oh."

KATY WINTERS: "Yeah?"

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "If I win..."

A beat.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "...don't call it an upset."

Kirsty walks away before Katy can respond.

Katy watches her disappear down the hallway.

KATY WINTERS: "Kirsty McKinney meets Maxwell Jett next, with a place in the Ring King final four on the line."

The broadcast cuts away.

Kirsty McKinney vs. Maxwell Jett

Match

The camera returns to Madison Square Garden.

The Ring King bracket appears briefly on screen.

RING KING — ROUND TWO

KIRSTY McKINNEY vs. MAXWELL JETT

Below it:

WINNER ADVANCES TO THE FINAL FOUR

MARK BRAVO: "Here we go."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Sixteen wrestlers began this tournament. Sol Azteca and Mikey Unlikely have already secured two of the four semifinal positions. Right now, we're about to find out who takes the third."

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

The reaction from Madison Square Garden rises immediately.

Kirsty McKinney steps through the curtain.

No smoke.

No dramatic pause.

No arms raised toward the rafters.

She simply walks onto the stage wearing the same focused, almost-neutral expression she carries into nearly every fight.

Except tonight...

there is a little more noise waiting for her.

Kirsty hears it.

She glances toward one side of Madison Square Garden.

Then the other.

A small section begins chanting her name.

CROWD: "KIRS-TY! KIRS-TY! KIRS-TY!"

Kirsty slows.

Just slightly.

Her mouth threatens to form a smile.

She catches herself.

Then flicks a strand of hair away from her face with that familiar look suggesting everybody in the building is making far too much of this.

MARK BRAVO: "Kirsty McKinney said earlier that if she wins tonight, don't call it an upset."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And I wouldn't. Not anymore."

MARK BRAVO: "Even against a former UTA Champion?"

JOHN PHILLIPS: "She's already survived Hakuryu. Circumstances were involved, yes, but Kirsty did exactly what elite wrestlers do. She recognized an opening and ended the match."

Kirsty starts down the ramp.

She walks the first half.

Then breaks into a short jog.

She reaches the ring and slides beneath the bottom rope.

Momentum carries her smoothly onto both knees.

Kirsty rises.

One deep squat.

Another.

Shoulder roll.

Hair flick.

That's it.

Madison Square Garden cheers anyway.

Kirsty looks around as if everyone has collectively misunderstood the assignment.

MARK BRAVO: "She really doesn't know what to do with people liking her."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "She's getting better at tolerating it."

Kirsty moves toward the ropes and begins stretching her shoulders.

She looks toward the entrance.

Waiting.

The music dies.

A moment later—

The arena lights drop.

One single white spotlight strikes the stage.

Then "Gold Standard" begins.

Cocky arena-rock bleeding into heavy trap drums.

The boos are immediate.

And loud.

Maxwell Jett steps through the curtain.

Designer robe.

Smirk already in place.

Behind him come Jacoby Jacobs and Darian Darrington.

First Class.

Maxwell stops beneath the spotlight.

Slowly turns.

Listening.

The boos increase.

He mouths:

MAXWELL JETT: "Keep it coming."

MARK BRAVO: "Listen to this place."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And look at Maxwell. He loves it."

Maxwell looks toward the ring.

Sees Kirsty.

Then dramatically checks an imaginary watch on his wrist.

Madison Square Garden explodes in boos.

Maxwell smiles.

Kirsty just stares at him.

MARK BRAVO: "There it is."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "He's been talking about Cinderella all week."

Maxwell takes one step down the ramp.

Stops.

Looks directly at Kirsty.

Then taps his wrist again.

Kirsty turns toward the nearest camera.

Her expression is completely flat.

She mouths:

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Jesus Christ."

MARK BRAVO: "I think she's over the clock metaphor."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "She's been over it for about a week."

Maxwell begins the walk.

No urgency.

Jacoby and Darian trail behind.

Maxwell points at one fan.

Then another.

He appears to inform both of them that their opinions are personally responsible for society's decline.

Finally, Maxwell reaches ringside.

He steps onto the apron.

Suddenly snaps into motion.

Slides beneath the bottom rope.

Climbs onto the second turnbuckle.

He blows an exaggerated kiss toward the crowd.

BOOOOOOOOO!

Maxwell drops back down.

Then turns toward Kirsty.

The smirk remains.

Kirsty remains perfectly still.

Maxwell approaches.

MAXWELL JETT: "Big night."

Kirsty says nothing.

MAXWELL JETT: "Madison Square Garden."

No response.

MAXWELL JETT: "Final eight."

Kirsty sighs.

MAXWELL JETT: "You should enjoy it."

Kirsty looks at him.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Are you going to wrestle at some point?"

The crowd laughs.

Maxwell's smile tightens.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Because if this is another speech, I would've stayed backstage."

Jacoby laughs from the floor.

Maxwell immediately turns toward him.

Jacoby stops.

Darian looks away.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "I don't think that reaction came from where Maxwell expected."

Maxwell removes his robe.

Hands it through the ropes.

His expression has changed.

Not dramatically.

But enough.

The referee brings both competitors toward center ring.

Kirsty looks toward Jacoby and Darian.

Then toward Maxwell.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "They staying there?"

MAXWELL JETT: "You worried?"

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "No."

She looks back toward First Class.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Just counting."

Maxwell's smile returns.

MAXWELL JETT: "Smart."

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Usually."

The referee sends them back.

Kirsty lowers her stance.

Maxwell rolls his shoulders.

The atmosphere changes immediately.

All of the talking is over.

At least for the moment.

DING! DING! DING!

MARK BRAVO: "Third semifinal berth on the line!"

Kirsty immediately drops lower.

Maxwell circles upright.

They meet in the center.

Collar-and-elbow—

No.

Kirsty ducks underneath before Maxwell can establish the tie.

Rear waistlock.

Outside trip.

Maxwell hits the mat.

Kirsty follows him down instantly.

One arm rides across the waist.

The other controls the wrist.

Maxwell tries to turn in.

Kirsty blocks it.

He tries the opposite direction.

Blocked again.

Kirsty shifts her hips.

Flattens him.

Then rides across his back.

MARK BRAVO: "That took about four seconds."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "This is Kirsty's world."

Maxwell gets one knee underneath himself.

Kirsty hooks the ankle.

Pulls.

Maxwell drops flat again.

The crowd reacts.

Kirsty looks almost bored.

Maxwell hears the reaction.

That bothers him more than the position.

MAXWELL JETT: "Get off me."

Kirsty shifts her weight harder across his shoulders.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Get up."

The crowd pops.

Maxwell reaches toward the ropes.

Too far.

Kirsty traps the wrist.

Slides around.

Half nelson.

Maxwell immediately turns his shoulder away from the mat.

Kirsty follows.

He rolls through.

Kirsty rides the motion.

They come back up—

And Maxwell suddenly reaches backward and grabs the top rope.

The referee calls for the break.

Kirsty releases immediately.

But not happily.

She throws both arms outward with an exaggerated sigh and backs away.

MARK BRAVO: "There's that personality."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "She hates rope breaks."

Maxwell stays near the ropes.

He adjusts his wrist.

His expression is different now.

The smirk isn't gone.

But it has become more deliberate.

He's thinking.

Kirsty motions toward the center.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Come on."

Maxwell looks toward Jacoby.

Then Darian.

Then back at Kirsty.

MAXWELL JETT: "Congratulations."

Kirsty tilts her head.

MAXWELL JETT: "You won the first thirty seconds."

Kirsty shrugs.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Only took me four."

The crowd laughs again.

Maxwell's jaw tightens.

MARK BRAVO: "Kirsty's getting under his skin."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And I'm not even sure she's trying."

Maxwell steps away from the ropes.

They circle again.

This time Maxwell lowers his stance.

Much more seriously.

They lock hands.

Kirsty immediately turns the wrist.

Maxwell rotates with it.

Steps through.

Reverses.

Arm wringer.

Kirsty rolls forward.

Kips—not up, but through—

And catches Maxwell's leg.

He hops once.

Kirsty sweeps the planted foot!

Maxwell drops.

Kirsty dives onto the waist.

Maxwell scrambles faster this time.

He reaches backward—

Thumb toward Kirsty's eye!

Kirsty jerks her head away!

The referee immediately warns Maxwell.

Maxwell raises both hands.

MAXWELL JETT: "What?"

He looks genuinely offended.

MAXWELL JETT: "I was reaching for the wrist."

MARK BRAVO: "The wrist is approximately two feet lower."

Maxwell uses the argument as cover to scoot backward.

Kirsty advances.

Maxwell suddenly grabs her waistband and pulls her forward into the middle rope!

Kirsty's throat hits rope!

She recoils!

JOHN PHILLIPS: "There it is!"

Maxwell springs up.

WHAM!

Running boot to the face!

Kirsty crashes backward onto the mat.

Maxwell immediately drops for the cover.

ONE!

Kirsty kicks out.

Maxwell doesn't look disappointed.

He looks satisfied.

Because the wrestling match Kirsty wanted...

has just become the wrestling match Maxwell wanted.

Maxwell grabs Kirsty's left arm.

He twists the wrist.

Drives his knee down across the elbow.

Kirsty grimaces.

Maxwell does it again.

MARK BRAVO: "And there's the adjustment."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Kirsty's entire game depends on grips, leverage, rides, control. Maxwell isn't trying to outwrestle her anymore."

Maxwell traps the wrist beneath his boot.

Looks toward the hard camera.

Then toward the crowd.

MAXWELL JETT: "THIS is why your stories don't have happy endings!"

BOOOOOOOOO!

Maxwell spreads his arms.

Soaks it in.

He looks back down—

Kirsty yanks her arm free!

Both hands around Maxwell's ankle!

She twists!

Maxwell flips forward and hits the mat!

Kirsty dives onto his back!

Rear waistlock!

Maxwell's eyes go wide.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "He gave her one second!"

MARK BRAVO: "And she took it!"

Kirsty plants her feet.

Maxwell realizes what's happening.

MAXWELL JETT: "No—"

Kirsty lifts!

WHAM!

GERMAN SUPLEX!

Maxwell lands high across the shoulders!

Kirsty maintains the waistlock.

Rolls through.

Back to her feet.

Maxwell desperately reaches toward the ropes.

Kirsty pulls him backward.

He swings an elbow.

Misses.

Kirsty changes her grip.

Gutwrench.

She starts lifting—

MARK BRAVO: "K-LIFT?!"

Maxwell panics.

He grabs Kirsty's injured arm.

Wrenches it violently downward!

Kirsty's grip breaks!

Maxwell lands.

CRACK!

Forearm across Kirsty's jaw!

Kirsty stumbles.

Maxwell grabs the arm again.

Arm wringer—

Snap suplex!

WHAM!

Kirsty hits hard.

Maxwell sits up immediately.

Breathing heavier now.

He looks toward Jacoby and Darian.

Neither man is smiling.

Neither is Maxwell.

Because Kirsty McKinney has already forced him to stop performing.

For the first time tonight...

Maxwell Jett looks like he realizes this might actually be difficult.

Maxwell gets to his feet first.

Whatever amusement he found in Kirsty McKinney before the bell is gone.

He reaches down.

Grabs the left wrist.

Kirsty immediately tries to roll toward him.

Maxwell steps over the arm.

Forces it straight.

STOMP!

Right across the elbow.

Kirsty jerks the arm into her body.

MARK BRAVO: "Maxwell Jett has found something."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And when Maxwell finds something, he doesn't leave it alone."

Maxwell doesn't.

He drags Kirsty up by that same wrist.

Hammerlock.

Kirsty shifts her hips, looking for an escape.

Maxwell drives the trapped arm higher between her shoulder blades.

Then—

WHAM!

HAMMERLOCK DDT!

Kirsty is planted face-first.

Maxwell rolls her over.

ONE!

TWO!

Kirsty kicks out.

Maxwell immediately grabs the arm again.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "That's the important part. He didn't spend one second arguing about the count."

MARK BRAVO: "Because this isn't about pinning her yet."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "It's about taking away the thing Kirsty does better than almost anybody."

Maxwell kneels beside Kirsty.

He bends the wrist backward.

Then folds the arm across his knee.

Kirsty's face tightens.

Her free hand searches for Maxwell's wrist.

She finds it.

Tries to peel his fingers away.

The damaged left arm doesn't cooperate.

Maxwell notices.

And smiles.

MAXWELL JETT: "What's wrong?"

He cranks harder.

MAXWELL JETT: "Can't wrestle with one hand?"

Kirsty looks up at him.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Can you?"

Before Maxwell can process the question—

Kirsty snatches his near wrist with her good hand.

Hooks one of his legs with hers.

Rolls!

ONE!

TWO!

MAXWELL KICKS OUT!

Both scramble up.

Kirsty shoots immediately.

Maxwell sprawls!

He gets heavy across her shoulders.

Front facelock.

Maxwell looks toward the hard camera.

MAXWELL JETT: "See?"

He smirks.

MAXWELL JETT: "She's not special."

Kirsty's right hand snakes behind Maxwell's knee.

Her hips shift.

She sits through.

Suddenly Maxwell's base disappears.

Kirsty turns the corner!

Maxwell tumbles sideways!

Kirsty comes out behind him!

Rear waistlock!

MARK BRAVO: "He keeps talking when he should be wrestling!"

Maxwell grabs the ropes before Kirsty can lift.

The referee calls for the break.

Kirsty releases.

Maxwell remains attached to the top rope.

Kirsty takes two steps backward.

Maxwell looks over his shoulder.

Then suddenly swings a back elbow!

Kirsty ducks.

Waistlock again!

Maxwell desperately hooks both arms around the top rope.

Kirsty pulls.

Maxwell hangs on.

The referee begins another count.

Kirsty lets go at four.

With an enormous irritated sigh.

She turns away—

CRACK!

Maxwell blasts the damaged arm from behind!

Kirsty drops to one knee.

The boos pour down.

MAXWELL JETT: "THAT'S CALLED EXPERIENCE!"

Maxwell points at his own head.

MAXWELL JETT: "YOU PEOPLE WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND!"

He turns back—

THUD!

Kirsty drives a forearm into his mouth.

Maxwell staggers.

The Garden erupts.

Kirsty shakes feeling back into her left hand.

Maxwell touches his lip.

Looks at his fingers.

Then at Kirsty.

His face hardens.

He charges.

Kirsty steps inside.

THUMP!

Knee into the midsection!

Maxwell folds.

Kirsty locks around the waist.

She tries to lift—

The left arm gives slightly.

Maxwell feels it.

He drives an elbow down across that arm!

Kirsty loses the grip.

Maxwell turns—

CRACK!

Kirsty catches him with a corkscrew forearm!

Maxwell spins and drops!

Kirsty covers!

ONE!

TWO!

Maxwell kicks out!

Kirsty doesn't complain.

She doesn't even look at the referee.

She immediately traps Maxwell's near arm.

Hooks a leg.

Starts folding him into an amateur-style stack.

Maxwell realizes what's happening.

MAXWELL JETT: "No, no, no—"

Kirsty keeps folding.

Maxwell's knees are forced toward his own chest.

His shoulders touch!

ONE!

TWO!

MAXWELL JERKS A SHOULDER UP!

Kirsty doesn't release.

She adjusts the position.

Threads her right leg through.

Maxwell's face changes.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Look at the transition!"

Kirsty abandons the pin and twists Maxwell's trapped leg inward while controlling his upper body.

Maxwell claws forward.

Kirsty drags him backward.

He reaches again.

Still too far from the ropes.

Kirsty cranks the neck in the opposite direction.

Maxwell yells out.

MARK BRAVO: "I don't even know what to call that."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Neither does Maxwell, but he knows it hurts!"

Maxwell's hand rises.

The crowd rises with it.

Kirsty looks completely detached.

Almost bored.

She tightens the hold.

Maxwell's hand hovers—

Jacoby Jacobs jumps onto the apron.

BOOOOOOOOOO!

The referee immediately turns toward him.

MARK BRAVO: "Come on!"

Jacoby isn't entering.

He isn't even pretending to.

He simply begins shouting about something that apparently requires the referee's immediate attention.

Kirsty looks up.

Sees him.

Her expression goes from bored...

...to deeply irritated.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Oh, fuck off."

She RELEASES Maxwell.

Gets to her feet.

Marches toward Jacoby.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "No, Kirsty! That's what they want!"

Jacoby drops immediately from the apron.

Kirsty reaches the ropes and points down at him.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Do it again."

Jacoby smiles.

Darian does too.

Kirsty realizes it.

Too late.

Maxwell is behind her.

He reaches for the damaged arm—

Kirsty spins!

She catches him coming!

Double-leg takedown!

Maxwell hits hard!

Kirsty passes immediately!

Mount!

Maxwell covers up!

Kirsty drives one short forearm down.

Another!

Maxwell bucks.

Kirsty rides him.

He turns.

She takes the back.

MARK BRAVO: "He tried to steal it and she STILL took him down!"

Kirsty reaches under Maxwell's chin.

Maxwell instantly grabs both of her hands.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "PITTY CHOKE!"

Kirsty tries to lock it.

Maxwell fights the hands desperately.

The left one.

The damaged one.

He finds two fingers.

Peels.

Kirsty's grip breaks.

Maxwell rolls underneath.

He snatches the left arm on the way through!

Turns!

Steps over!

LONG ISLAND LOCK!

Kirsty's eyes go wide.

Maxwell sits back on the arm!

MARK BRAVO: "HE'S GOT IT!"

Kirsty's entire body tightens.

Maxwell controls the wrist.

Her left arm is fully extended.

He cranks.

Kirsty's free hand slaps the canvas—

Not tapping.

Searching.

Trying to pull herself forward.

MAXWELL JETT: "GO AHEAD!"

He wrenches harder.

MAXWELL JETT: "SHOW THEM HOW TOUGH CINDERELLA IS!"

Kirsty grits her teeth.

She tries rolling toward the pressure.

Maxwell adjusts with her.

Stops the escape.

Kirsty looks toward the ropes.

Several feet away.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "This is exactly what Maxwell has been building toward. Everything he has done to that arm was for this."

Kirsty drags herself forward.

Six inches.

Maxwell pulls backward.

Erases four of them.

Kirsty moves again.

Her fingertips reach—

Nothing.

Maxwell looks toward the crowd.

MAXWELL JETT: "WATCH!"

He looks toward the hard camera.

MAXWELL JETT: "WATCH THE STORY END!"

He leans back.

Kirsty screams through clenched teeth.

Her right hand rises.

Maxwell sees it.
His eyes light up.
The hand hangs above the canvas.
Madison Square Garden roars for Kirsty.
CROWD: "KIRS-TY! KIRS-TY! KIRS-TY!"
Kirsty hears them.
She looks annoyed.
Even now.
Especially now.
Then instead of reaching for the ropes again...
...Kirsty rolls toward Maxwell.
Hard.
He tries to follow.
She keeps rolling.
Her legs come up.
One hooks behind Maxwell's neck.
The other catches his shoulder.
Kirsty twists her hips!
Maxwell is pulled forward!
His shoulders hit the canvas!
ONE!
TWO!
THR—
MAXWELL RELEASES THE HOLD AND KICKS OUT!
Both wrestlers explode apart.
Kirsty rolls toward the ropes, clutching her left arm.
Maxwell scrambles to his knees.
His eyes are wide.
That was close.
Very close.
Kirsty pulls herself upright using the ropes.
Maxwell rises across from her.
For several seconds, neither moves.

Jacoby and Darian shout instructions from outside.

Maxwell doesn't acknowledge them.

He's staring only at Kirsty.

Kirsty flexes the fingers of her left hand.

Once.

Twice.

Not much strength there.

She looks at it.

Then at Maxwell.

And gives him the smallest possible shrug.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Still got three."

The Garden erupts.

Maxwell charges.

Maxwell charges.

Kirsty steps forward to meet him.

CRACK!

Maxwell's forearm catches Kirsty across the jaw!

She stumbles backward into the ropes.

Maxwell follows.

CRACK!

Another forearm!

Kirsty covers up.

Maxwell grabs the damaged left arm.

Yanks it straight.

THUD!

Shoulder-first into the turnbuckles!

Kirsty drops to a knee.

Maxwell backs away.

He looks toward Jacoby and Darian.

Then toward Kirsty.

He measures her.

MARK BRAVO: "Maxwell smells the end."

Kirsty gets one foot underneath herself.

Maxwell rushes in—

Kirsty suddenly ducks!

Rear waistlock!

But only briefly.

The left arm can't maintain it.

Maxwell breaks free!

He spins—

CRACK!

SUPERKICK!

Kirsty crumples!

Maxwell falls into the cover!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

KIRSTY GETS THE SHOULDER UP!

MARK BRAVO: "KIRSTY SURVIVES!"

Maxwell sits upright.

His mouth falls open.

He looks at the referee.

MAXWELL JETT: "Three."

The referee holds up two fingers.

MAXWELL JETT: "That was three."

Two fingers again.

Maxwell looks toward Jacoby.

Jacoby holds his hands out.

Darian tells Maxwell to stay on her.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "This is where Maxwell Jett has to be careful. Kirsty McKinney doesn't need much time to turn a position into a pin."

Maxwell grabs Kirsty by the hair.

Pulls her upright.

Kirsty can barely get her feet underneath her.

Maxwell hooks her.

Kirsty suddenly drops her weight!

Inside trip!

Maxwell hits the mat!
Kirsty dives over him!
Front facelock!
She tries to cinch it with both hands—
Her left hand slips.
Maxwell immediately exploits it.
He rolls through!
Both rise!
WHAM!
MAXWELL CLOTHESLINES KIRSTY INSIDE OUT!
Kirsty lands hard.
Maxwell stands over her.
Breathing heavily.
The arrogance is gone again.
This is work now.
Real work.
MAXWELL JETT: "Stay down."
Kirsty rolls onto her stomach.
MAXWELL JETT: "Just stay down."
Kirsty starts pushing herself up with her right arm.
Maxwell laughs once.
No humor in it.
MAXWELL JETT: "Fine."
He pulls Kirsty upright.
Hooks her.
Lifts—
Kirsty shifts in midair!
She lands behind him!
Maxwell spins around—
Kirsty shoots underneath!
Double-leg!
Maxwell sprawls!
Kirsty keeps driving!

Maxwell is forced backward!

His shoulders brush the canvas!

ONE!

Maxwell rolls through!

He catches Kirsty's left arm!

Kirsty's eyes widen.

Maxwell tries to transition back into the Long Island Lock!

JOHN PHILLIPS: "AGAIN!"

Kirsty recognizes it immediately.

She clasps her hands before Maxwell can extend the arm.

Maxwell pulls.

Kirsty's damaged hand begins slipping.

Maxwell pulls harder.

The fingers separate.

Kirsty changes tactics.

Instead of fighting the extension—

She rolls toward Maxwell!

He gets dragged forward!

Kirsty comes through underneath!

Maxwell loses the arm!

Both scramble!

Maxwell gets up first.

Kirsty is on one knee.

CRACK!

Maxwell kicks her directly in the chest!

Kirsty falls backward.

Maxwell drops to his knees beside her.

He grabs her by the jaw.

MAXWELL JETT: "You are not better than me."

Kirsty's eyes focus on him.

MAXWELL JETT: "Do you understand?"

Kirsty breathes heavily.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Then why..."

She takes another breath.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "...are you still talking?"

Maxwell's face twists.

SLAP!

He slaps Kirsty across the face.

The Garden erupts in boos.

Maxwell pulls her up.

Kirsty fires a forearm!

Maxwell answers!

Kirsty again!

Maxwell again!

Kirsty throws another—

Maxwell catches the damaged arm!

He twists!

Kirsty cries out!

Maxwell spins behind—

Kirsty reaches backward with her good arm!

Headlock takeover!

Maxwell rolls through!

Both scramble again!

Kirsty gets behind him!

She locks her hands around the waist—

Almost.

The damaged left hand won't close.

Maxwell sees it.

Back elbow!

Kirsty ducks!

She changes levels.

Gets underneath Maxwell.

And somehow powers him onto her shoulders!

MARK BRAVO: "LOOK AT KIRSTY!"

Maxwell is seated across her shoulders!

Kirsty's legs tremble.

Her left arm barely controls him.

But her lower body does the work.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "All that strength in those hips and legs!"

Kirsty leans forward—

WHAM!

FRONT ELECTRIC CHAIR DROP!

Maxwell crashes chest and face-first into the canvas!

The Garden explodes!

Kirsty rolls onto her back.

She can't capitalize immediately.

Her left arm lies against her chest.

Maxwell is face-down several feet away.

MARK BRAVO: "That may have been Kirsty's opening!"

JOHN PHILLIPS: "But can she use it? Maxwell has spent this entire match dismantling one of the tools she needs to finish him!"

Kirsty rolls toward Maxwell.

Slowly.

She reaches him.

Hooks one leg.

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

MAXWELL KICKS OUT!

Kirsty rolls off.

She stares at the ceiling.

Then sighs.

KIRSTY McKINNEY: "Of course."

The crowd laughs and applauds.

Kirsty sits up.

Across the ring, Maxwell crawls toward the ropes.

Jacoby is there.

Darian beside him.

Maxwell reaches the bottom rope.

Jacoby crouches down.

JACOBY JACOBS: "Max."

Maxwell looks at him.

Jacoby reaches inside his jacket.

Not far.

Just enough.

Maxwell immediately understands.

He shakes his head.

JACOBY JACOBS: "Take it."

Maxwell's eyes flash.

MAXWELL JETT: "No."

DARIAN DARRINGTON: "Max—"

MAXWELL JETT: "I said no."

Kirsty is getting up behind him.

JACOBY JACOBS: "She's still coming."

Maxwell turns his head toward Kirsty.

Then back to Jacoby.

MAXWELL JETT: "I don't need it."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "What's happening down there?"

MARK BRAVO: "Jacoby offered him something. Maxwell refused it."

Darian reaches toward Maxwell.

DARIAN DARRINGTON: "Then let us—"

MAXWELL JETT: "NO!"

Maxwell slaps Darian's hand away.

MAXWELL JETT: "I HAVE HER."

That costs him.

Kirsty grabs him around the waist!

Maxwell's eyes widen.

Kirsty pulls him away from the ropes!

Jacoby reaches instinctively toward Maxwell's ankle—

MAXWELL JETT: "DON'T!"

Jacoby freezes.

Kirsty lifts—

WHAM!

GERMAN SUPLEX!

Maxwell folds across his shoulders!

Kirsty can't maintain the bridge.

The damaged arm gives out.

Maxwell rolls onto his side.

Kirsty pushes herself upright.

Maxwell rises too.

He is dazed.

Angry.

Humiliated.

He swings wildly.

Kirsty ducks.

Maxwell turns.

Kirsty shoots.

Maxwell sprawls.

Good sprawl.

He stuffs the takedown.

Kirsty switches.

Single leg.

Maxwell hops.

Reaches down.

Hooks Kirsty's damaged arm.

He twists!

Kirsty releases.

Maxwell shoves her away.

Kirsty rebounds off the ropes.

Maxwell catches her—

Kirsty rolls through!

Maxwell follows!

Both come up!

Maxwell swings—

Kirsty ducks underneath!

She dives at the legs!

Maxwell sprawls again!

This time Kirsty doesn't fight it.

She lets Maxwell's momentum carry him over her.

Hooks one leg.

Threads her own legs through.

Turns her hips.

Maxwell realizes what she's doing.

MAXWELL JETT: "NO!"

Kirsty's legs snap shut.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "SHEAR CRADLE!"

Maxwell's shoulders are folded down!

Kirsty doesn't need the damaged left arm.

Her legs have him trapped.

Her hips compress his body.

Maxwell kicks frantically.

He twists.

He reaches.

Nothing.

Kirsty looks toward the hard camera.

Hair hanging across part of her face.

Left arm cradled against her chest.

Expression exhausted.

And somehow...

still bored.

ONE!

Maxwell bucks!

TWO!

Jacoby moves toward the apron!

Darian grabs him.

Maxwell sees them.

MAXWELL JETT: "DON'T!"

THREE!

DING! DING! DING!

Madison Square Garden ERUPTS.

For half a second, nobody in the ring moves.

Then Kirsty releases the cradle.

Maxwell rolls onto his stomach.

Kirsty rolls onto her back.

Her music hits.

MARK BRAVO: "KIRSTY McKINNEY IS GOING TO THE FINAL FOUR!"

JOHN PHILLIPS: "She did it! She beat Maxwell Jett!"

Kirsty sits up.

She looks toward the referee as though she wants confirmation despite having heard the bell.

Her hand is raised.

And now Kirsty finally allows herself something.

A smile.

Not enormous.

Not theatrical.

But real.

Madison Square Garden gets louder.

MARK BRAVO: "No powder tonight! No Jed Dye! No Hakuryu controversy! Kirsty McKinney just pinned a former UTA Champion in the middle of Madison Square Garden!"

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And Maxwell Jett was outstanding tonight. He took away one of Kirsty's arms. He escaped her wrestling repeatedly. He had her trapped in the Long Island Lock. He came within fractions of putting her away."

MARK BRAVO: "But three seconds is three seconds."

The tournament graphic appears.

RING KING 2026 — FINAL FOUR

SOL AZTECA — QUALIFIED

MIKEY UNLIKELY — QUALIFIED

KIRSTY McKINNEY — QUALIFIED

ONE POSITION REMAINS

Kirsty climbs through the ropes.

She drops to the floor.

Fans along the aisle reach toward her.

Kirsty starts past them.

Then pauses.

Looks at the hands.

Looks toward the ring.

Then reluctantly slaps a few on her way up the ramp.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "I think she's starting to like this."

MARK BRAVO: "Don't tell her."

Kirsty disappears through the curtain.

Her music fades.

But the camera does not leave the ring.

Maxwell Jett hasn't moved.

He's sitting on the canvas.

Staring forward.

Jacoby Jacobs climbs onto the apron.

Darian Darrington follows.

Neither enters immediately.

They know him well enough.

Finally Maxwell turns his head.

He looks at Jacoby.

Then Darian.

Jacoby slowly steps between the ropes.

JACOBY JACOBS: "Max—"

MAXWELL JETT: "Don't."

Jacoby stops.

Darian enters behind him.

DARIAN DARRINGTON: "You had her."

Maxwell looks up.

MAXWELL JETT: "I know."

He gets to one knee.

JACOBY JACOBS: "We could've—"

MAXWELL JETT: "I KNOW."

Silence.

Maxwell stands.

His eyes remain on the canvas where Kirsty pinned him.

MAXWELL JETT: "I had her."

Neither man answers.

MAXWELL JETT: "One arm."

He looks at Jacoby.

MAXWELL JETT: "She had one fucking arm."

Jacoby says nothing.

MAXWELL JETT: "And I had her."

Darian cautiously steps closer.

DARIAN DARRINGTON: "So what now?"

Maxwell looks at him.

Something changes.

Not rage.

Not embarrassment.

Calculation.

He looks toward Jacoby.

Jacoby seems to understand before Maxwell says anything.

JACOBY JACOBS: "You said he wasn't needed."

Maxwell's jaw tightens.

A long pause.

MAXWELL JETT: "I was wrong."

Jacoby and Darian exchange a look.

Maxwell steps between them.

He starts toward the ropes.

DARIAN DARRINGTON: "So...?"

Maxwell stops.

He doesn't turn around.

MAXWELL JETT: "Call him."

A beat.

MAXWELL JETT: "Tell him it's time."

Maxwell steps through the ropes.

He drops to the floor.

Jacoby looks at Darian.

Darian slowly nods.

Neither says the name.

They follow Maxwell up the ramp.

MARK BRAVO: "Call who?"

JOHN PHILLIPS: "That's the second time we've heard First Class talking about somebody Maxwell apparently hasn't wanted here yet."

MARK BRAVO: "Well, whatever Maxwell Jett thought before tonight, Kirsty McKinney just changed his mind."

The camera follows First Class toward the curtain.

Maxwell never looks back.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Three words, Bravo."

First Class disappears backstage.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Tell him it's time."

Cut away.

Another Failure

Segment

The broadcast cuts away from ringside.

Outside Madison Square Garden, the camera moves to the backstage parking area.

An SUV has just pulled into position.

The camera catches JED EYE and YOSHII arriving at the arena.

Jed closes the door of their SUV while Yoshii retrieves his gear from the back.

JED EYE: "Tonight, we keep our heads down. We handle our business, and—"

WHAM!

Jed is suddenly driven face-first into the side of the SUV!

SINJA!

Sinja has appeared from nowhere and immediately begins hammering Jed with forearms.

SINJA: "???????"

Another forearm.

SINJA: "YOU RUINED IT!"

Sinja grabs Jed by his shirt and slams him against the vehicle.

SINJA: "?????????"

SINJA: "YOU RUINED EVERYTHING!"

Jed attempts to cover up, but Sinja continues unloading.

SINJA: "?????????????????????"

SINJA: "THIS IS YOUR FAULT!"

Sinja grabs Jed by the throat and draws his fist back—

YOSHII grabs Sinja from behind and violently pulls him away.

SINJA: "??!"

SINJA: "LET ME GO!"

Sinja fights desperately against Yoshii's grip.

Jed sees his opening.

YOSHII: "Jed."

Yoshii motions toward the building.

YOSHII: "Go."

Jed doesn't hesitate.

Holding his jaw, he quickly heads inside.

Sinja sees him escaping.

SINJA: "??!"

SINJA: "NO!"

Sinja finally breaks away from Yoshii.

SINJA: "?????!"

SINJA: "COME BACK!"

Too late.

Jed disappears inside.

Sinja stops dead.

SINJA: "???"

He kicks the SUV.

SINJA: "HE RUINED IT!"

Yoshii stares at him.

SINJA: "?????????????"

SINJA: "HE RUINED EVERYTHING!"

Yoshii simply shakes his head.

No argument.

No anger.

Just disappointment.

Yoshii picks up his bag.

SINJA: "?????????!"

SINJA: "YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!"

Yoshii shakes his head again before walking toward the building.

Sinja watches him disappear.

Then—

His entire body stiffens.

The anger vanishes instantly.

Someone is standing behind him.

Sinja doesn't even have to look.

He already knows.

Slowly, he turns.

HAKURYU.

The White Dragon stands directly behind his disciple.

Motionless.

Expressionless.

Sinja immediately lowers his eyes.

SINJA: "??..."

Master...

Hakuryu looks toward the doorway where Jed Eye escaped.

Then back toward Sinja.

The silence becomes unbearable.

Finally—

HAKURYU: "?????"

Strike one.

Sinja swallows.

SINJA: "?????????—"

Master, Yoshii interfered—

Hakuryu raises one finger.

Sinja immediately stops.

Hakuryu steps closer.

HAKURYU: "?????????"

Do not make excuses.

Sinja lowers his head further.

HAKURYU: "?????????????????????"

I gave you an opportunity to reclaim your honor.

Hakuryu glances toward the entrance.

HAKURYU: "?????????????????"

But you failed again.

Sinja says nothing.

Hakuryu raises one finger between them.

HAKURYU: "?????"

Strike one.

Then a second finger.

HAKURYU: "?????????????????"

Strike two will be your final opportunity.

Hakuryu pauses.

Then raises a third finger.

Sinja's eyes slowly lift toward it.

Hakuryu's voice drops almost to a whisper.

HAKURYU: "???????"

There will be no strike three.

Sinja's expression changes.

Hakuryu lowers his hand.

HAKURYU: "?????????????????????????????"

If you disappoint me a third time, you will no longer be my disciple.

Sinja looks stunned.

But Hakuryu isn't finished.

He moves closer until they're almost face-to-face.

HAKURYU: "?????????????????"

Then you become my problem.

Sinja slowly looks up.

Hakuryu stares directly into his eyes.

HAKURYU: "?????????????????"

And I do not leave problems unresolved.

Silence.

Sinja understands exactly what his master means.

SINJA: ".....?????"

...Yes, Master.

Hakuryu steps past him.

After several steps, he stops without turning around.

HAKURYU: "???????"

Finish it next time.

Hakuryu continues toward the arena.

Sinja remains beside the SUV, completely motionless.

Moments ago, he was screaming at Jed Eye.

Now?

He looks shaken.

Because Jed Eye is no longer the only person Sinja needs to worry about.

He has failed the White Dragon once.

He has two strikes remaining.

And Hakuryu has made one thing terrifyingly clear—

there will never be a strike three.

FADE OUT.

Tension in The Empire

Segment

The broadcast cuts backstage to The Empire's locker room.

There is considerably less energy in the room than there was earlier tonight.

Marie Van Claudio stands in front of the mirror, already dressed for tonight's main event.

She adjusts one of her wristbands.

Pulls it tighter.

Then tighter again.

Amy Harrison sits nearby, one leg crossed over the other.

Valkyrie Knox stands against the wall, arms folded.

Clovis Black occupies another corner of the room.

Silent.

Motionless.

Trey Mack sits on a bench, still feeling the effects of his match with Kairo Bey.

Marie looks at him through the mirror.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Do you know how distracting that is?"

Trey looks up.

TREY MACK: "What?"

Marie turns around.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "That."

She points at Trey.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "What just happened out there."

Trey exhales through his nose.

TREY MACK: "Marie—"

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "No."

She holds up a hand.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Do you know what I should be thinking about right now?"

Trey doesn't answer.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Mike Best."

Marie points toward the door.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "A Hall of Famer."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "A man who just beat Bobby Dean clean."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "A man who has been doing this long enough to recognize one mistake and turn it into the end of your night."

Marie steps away from the mirror.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "That's what I should be thinking about."

She taps herself on the chest.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "I am one match away from the final four."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Two wins away from walking into Los Angeles and becoming the Ring Queen."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "And instead?"

Her eyes return to Trey.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "I'm standing here wondering what the hell is going on with you."

Trey stands.

TREY MACK: "What's going on with me?"

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "That's what I asked."

TREY MACK: "I lost a match."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "You lost to Kairo Bey."

TREY MACK: "Yeah."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "After I told you I needed everybody focused tonight."

TREY MACK: "And I was focused."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Were you?"

Trey stares at her.

TREY MACK: "Yeah."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Because from where I was sitting, you got outsmarted."

Trey's jaw shifts.

Across the room, Clovis's eyes move toward Marie.

TREY MACK: "Kairo wrestled a good match."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Oh, good."

Marie gives him a sarcastic little clap.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "I'm glad we're giving out compliments now."

TREY MACK: "That's not what I'm doing."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Then what are you doing?"

TREY MACK: "Telling you what happened."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "I know what happened. I watched it."

Trey takes a breath.

TREY MACK: "He went after my leg. He got me thinking about it. Then he used it against me."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Exactly."

TREY MACK: "Exactly what?"

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "He figured you out."

That lands.

Trey doesn't immediately respond.

Clovis unfolds his arms.

Nothing else.

But Amy notices.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Kairo Bey figured you out in one match."

TREY MACK: "I nearly beat him."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Nearly doesn't help The Empire."

Trey looks away for a second.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Nearly didn't put you in Ring King."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Nearly didn't get Clovis past Lindsey."

Clovis's eyes narrow.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Nearly isn't why we're here."

TREY MACK: "Don't bring Clovis into this."

The room goes noticeably quieter.

Marie tilts her head.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Excuse me?"

TREY MACK: "You want to be pissed at me? Be pissed at me."

TREY MACK: "Leave him out of it."

Clovis looks at Trey.

Trey never looks back at him.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "This isn't about protecting your buddy's feelings."

Clovis's head turns slowly toward Marie.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "This is about The Empire."

TREY MACK: "I know what it's about."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Do you?"

Trey takes one step toward her.

TREY MACK: "I've been the one standing in this room telling everybody that."

Amy's eyebrows rise slightly.

TREY MACK: "When you two were ready to tear each other's heads off, who was standing in the middle?"

He gestures between Marie and Amy.

TREY MACK: "Who kept saying one bad night wasn't gonna pull this thing apart?"

TREY MACK: "Who kept saying Empire first?"

Marie stares at him.

TREY MACK: "So don't stand there and act like I don't give a damn because I lost tonight."

A beat.

TREY MACK: "I give a damn."

TREY MACK: "That's why losing pisses me off too."

For the first time, Marie doesn't immediately have an answer.

Amy watches her closely.

Valkyrie remains stone-faced.

Clovis watches Trey.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Then start showing it."

Trey lets out a disbelieving laugh.

TREY MACK: "Come on."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "No, Trey. I'm serious."

Marie steps closer.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "What have you done lately?"

Trey's expression hardens.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Because I have a main event tonight."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "I'm still in Ring King."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "I'm still carrying The Empire toward something."

She points toward Trey.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "And lately, I don't think you've been pulling your weight."

Silence.

Trey's playful swagger is completely gone.

He just stares at Marie.

Behind him—

Clovis pushes himself away from the wall.

One step.

That's all.

But everybody sees it.

Especially Marie.

She looks past Trey.

Directly at Clovis.

Clovis says nothing.

His face says enough.

Marie holds his stare.

AMY HARRISON: "Marie."

Marie doesn't look away from Clovis.

AMY HARRISON: "You've made your point."

Now Marie looks at Amy.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Have I?"

AMY HARRISON: "Yeah."

Amy gives a small shrug.

AMY HARRISON: "Unless the plan is to piss off half the room before you wrestle Mike Best."

Marie stares at her.

Amy gives her a sweet smile.

AMY HARRISON: "Which would be..."

She pauses.

AMY HARRISON: "...distracting."

Trey looks down, trying very hard not to react.

Valkyrie's eyes shift toward Amy.

Clovis doesn't move.

Marie absolutely understands the jab.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Cute."

AMY HARRISON: "I thought so."

Marie takes a breath.

She turns back toward Trey.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Tonight, I need people around me who are focused."

TREY MACK: "I am focused."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Then focus somewhere else."

Trey blinks.

TREY MACK: "What?"

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "You're not coming to ringside."

Trey stares at her.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "I have Mike Best tonight."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "I don't need another distraction."

Trey's eyes narrow.

TREY MACK: "Right."

Marie turns toward the others.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Amy."

Amy stands.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Valkyrie."

Valkyrie pushes away from the wall.

Marie looks toward Clovis.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Let's go."

Amy walks toward the door.

Valkyrie follows.

Marie takes several steps before realizing there are only two sets of footsteps behind her.

She stops.

Looks back.

Clovis hasn't moved.

He stands beside Trey.

Marie looks at him.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Clovis."

Clovis meets her eyes.

Nothing.

Marie waits.

So does Amy.

Trey finally glances sideways at his partner.

TREY MACK: "Go ahead."

Clovis doesn't even look at him.

His eyes remain on Marie.

Then Clovis reaches down.

He picks up Trey's bag from beside the bench.

Hands it to him.

That's his answer.

Amy's smile disappears.

Not because she's upset.

Because she understands exactly what just happened.

Marie does too.

For a moment, nobody says anything.

VALKYRIE KNOX: "Marie."

Marie looks toward Valkyrie.

Valkyrie gives a slight motion toward the hallway.

The match.

Mike Best.

Focus.

Marie looks back at Clovis one final time.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Fine."

She turns and walks out.

Amy follows.

Before leaving, Amy glances over her shoulder at Trey and Clovis.

Then at Marie.

A tiny smile creeps across her face.

She disappears into the hallway.

Valkyrie is the last of the three to leave.

The door closes.

Trey and Clovis are alone.

Trey looks down at the bag Clovis just handed him.

TREY MACK: "You didn't have to do that."

Clovis looks at him.

A beat.

CLOVIS BLACK: "Yeah."

Another beat.

CLOVIS BLACK: "I did."

Clovis walks toward the door.

Trey watches him for a moment.

Then follows.

The camera remains on the now-empty Empire locker room for several seconds.

Five members entered tonight under one banner.

For the first time, they didn't all leave the room together.

Cut away.

UTA Remembers — 25 Years Later

Segment

The screen fades slowly to black.

No UTA logo.

No entrance music.

No sound from Madison Square Garden.

For several seconds, there is nothing.

Then a simple line of white text appears.

SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

A second line slowly fades beneath it.

25 YEARS LATER

The words fade.

A soft instrumental score begins.

Nothing sweeping.

Nothing designed to manufacture emotion.

Just quiet piano beneath images of New York City today.

Morning sunlight against the skyline.

People moving through the streets.

A firefighter walking past an FDNY engine.

The American flag moving gently in the breeze.

Then the reflecting pools at the National September 11 Memorial.

The camera moves across the names surrounding the water.

Cut to black.

ROSA DELGADO sits alone against a simple dark backdrop.

No wrestling gear.

No graphics beyond her name.

ROSA DELGADO

Rosa takes a moment before speaking.

ROSA DELGADO: "I was six."

She nods slightly.

ROSA DELGADO: "So when people ask me what I remember about September 11th..."

She pauses.

ROSA DELGADO: "Honestly?"

ROSA DELGADO: "Pieces."

Cut briefly to an American flag hanging from the window of a New York apartment.

ROSA DELGADO: (V.O.) "I remember adults being scared."

ROSA DELGADO: (V.O.) "That's probably the biggest thing."

Back to Rosa.

ROSA DELGADO: "When you're a kid, adults are supposed to know what's going on."

ROSA DELGADO: "They're supposed to tell you everything's okay."

Rosa looks down for a moment.

ROSA DELGADO: "And I remember looking at people that day and realizing they didn't know if everything was okay."

A beat.

ROSA DELGADO: "I didn't understand what I was seeing."

ROSA DELGADO: "I learned that part later."

Cut.

JAXON RYDER.

JAXON RYDER

Jaxon leans forward, hands together.

JAXON RYDER: "I was four years old."

JAXON RYDER: "I'm not gonna sit here twenty-five years later and pretend I've got some perfect memory of that morning."

He shakes his head.

JAXON RYDER: "I don't."

JAXON RYDER: "Most of what September 11th means to me came from growing up afterward."

Images of flags placed around the memorial.

JAXON RYDER: (V.O.) "From hearing the stories."

JAXON RYDER: (V.O.) "From learning the names."

JAXON RYDER: (V.O.) "From learning about the people who ran out..."

An FDNY memorial patch.

JAXON RYDER: (V.O.) "...and the people who ran in."

Back to Jaxon.

JAXON RYDER: "I represent this country every time I walk through that curtain."

He pauses.

JAXON RYDER: "Tonight, that flag means something different."

JAXON RYDER: "It isn't about being louder than anybody."

JAXON RYDER: "It's about remembering."

Cut.

GRAHAM KEEL.

GRAHAM KEEL

Graham sits perfectly still.

Hands folded.

His answer is characteristically measured.

GRAHAM KEEL: "I was seventeen."

GRAHAM KEEL: "I was in England."

A pause.

GRAHAM KEEL: "And I remember watching it happen."

He takes a breath.

GRAHAM KEEL: "There are moments when distance stops meaning very much."

GRAHAM KEEL: "That was one."

Present-day footage of people walking through Lower Manhattan.

GRAHAM KEEL: (V.O.) "Thousands of miles away, people stopped what they were doing."

GRAHAM KEEL: (V.O.) "They stood around televisions."

GRAHAM KEEL: (V.O.) "They called people they knew."

GRAHAM KEEL: (V.O.) "They watched."

Back to Graham.

GRAHAM KEEL: "And there was this terrible understanding that the world had just changed."

Graham looks directly into the camera.

GRAHAM KEEL: "It wasn't only America watching."

GRAHAM KEEL: "The world was watching."

Cut to black.

A few seconds pass.

DAVID HIGHTOWER.

DAVID HIGHTOWER

David sits forward with his forearms against his knees.

He doesn't immediately look into the camera.

DAVID HIGHTOWER: "Ya remember the people."

He rubs his hands together.

DAVID HIGHTOWER: "That's what I think folks oughta do."

DAVID HIGHTOWER: "Don't get so caught up rememberin' buildings fallin' that ya forget there were people inside 'em."

David finally looks up.

DAVID HIGHTOWER: "Somebody's daddy."

DAVID HIGHTOWER: "Somebody's mama."

DAVID HIGHTOWER: "Somebody's kid."

DAVID HIGHTOWER: "Somebody who kissed their family goodbye that mornin' and figured they'd see 'em after work."

The camera holds on David.

DAVID HIGHTOWER: "That's the part that'll get ya."

He nods slowly.

DAVID HIGHTOWER: "Just folks goin' to work."

Cut to a firefighter's helmet at a memorial.

DAVID HIGHTOWER: (V.O.) "And then you had other folks who knew damn well what was happenin'..."

Another image.

Flowers beside an FDNY remembrance plaque.

DAVID HIGHTOWER: (V.O.) "...and went toward it anyway."

Back to David.

DAVID HIGHTOWER: "I know we throw the word tough around a lot in our business."

David shakes his head.

DAVID HIGHTOWER: "That?"

DAVID HIGHTOWER: "That's tough."

Cut.

MIKE BEST.

MIKE BEST

Mike sits alone.

No Hall of Fame ring deliberately presented to the camera.

No Son of GOD.

No swagger.

For perhaps the only time tonight, Mike Best seems completely uninterested in making the moment about Mike Best.

MIKE BEST: "Twenty-five years is a long time."

He looks down.

MIKE BEST: "Long enough that you've got adults walking around now who weren't even alive when it happened."

MIKE BEST: "Long enough that memory starts becoming history."

Mike looks into the camera.

MIKE BEST: "And there's a difference."

A pause.

MIKE BEST: "History is something you read."

MIKE BEST: "Memory belongs to somebody."

The instrumental bed almost completely disappears.

MIKE BEST: "There are families in this city who don't need a documentary to tell them what September 11th was."

MIKE BEST: "They've got an empty chair."

MIKE BEST: "They've got a photograph."

MIKE BEST: "They've got a name."

Mike pauses.

MIKE BEST: "So I'm not gonna give you some speech about what America learned."

MIKE BEST: "I'm not qualified to speak for everybody."

He leans back slightly.

MIKE BEST: "I'll just say this."

A beat.

MIKE BEST: "Remember the people."

MIKE BEST: "Not just what happened to them."

MIKE BEST: "Who they were."

Black.

The piano returns.

Now the package begins cutting between all five.

ROSA DELGADO: "The people who went to work."

JAXON RYDER: "The people who answered the call."

GRAHAM KEEL: "The people whose lives changed in an instant."

DAVID HIGHTOWER: "The families who had to keep goin' afterward."

MIKE BEST: "The people."

Cut to the memorial pools.

Water disappears endlessly into the center.

Then another voice.

ROSA DELGADO: (V.O.) "Twenty-five years later..."

An American flag.

JAXON RYDER: (V.O.) "...we remember."

A flower resting against one of the engraved names.

GRAHAM KEEL: (V.O.) "We remember."

An FDNY helmet.

DAVID HIGHTOWER: (V.O.) "We remember."

Finally, the New York skyline.

MIKE BEST: (V.O.) "We remember."

The image fades slowly to black.

IN MEMORY OF THOSE WE LOST

SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

A final line appears beneath it.

25 YEARS LATER — WE REMEMBER

The screen remains black for several seconds.

Then, without commentary, the broadcast transitions back to Madison Square Garden.

If He Accepts

Segment

The broadcast cuts backstage.

Scott Stevens is walking quickly through one of Madison Square Garden's backstage corridors, tablet in one hand, headset hanging around his neck.

He's clearly going somewhere.

Which means, naturally—

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "SCOTT!"

Stevens stops.

His shoulders sink slightly.

He closes his eyes.

Just for a second.

SCOTT STEVENS: "No."

Madman Szalinski comes hurrying into frame.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "You don't even know what I'm asking."

SCOTT STEVENS: "You're asking about Chris Ross."

Madman stops.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Okay, first of all..."

He points at Scott.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "...that's profiling."

Scott stares at him.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Second..."

Madman lowers his hand.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "...yes."

Scott starts walking again.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Then the answer is still no."

Madman falls into step beside him.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Scott."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Madman."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Scott."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Madman."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Scott."

Stevens stops again.

SCOTT STEVENS: "What?"

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "I would like to formally request one United Toughness Alliance Championship opportunity."

Madman gives him a pleasant little smile.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Please."

Scott looks at him for several seconds.

SCOTT STEVENS: "No."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "God damn it."

Scott starts walking.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Okay, but this time I said please."

SCOTT STEVENS: "And last week you shot the champion in the face."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Accidentally."

SCOTT STEVENS: "With a musket."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Technically, yes."

SCOTT STEVENS: "You then knocked him into a wall."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "That part was intentional."

Scott stops.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "I feel like honesty should count for something here."

SCOTT STEVENS: "It doesn't."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Fair."

Stevens turns fully toward him now.

SCOTT STEVENS: "You attacked Chris during his tournament match."

SCOTT STEVENS: "You cost him his place in Ring King."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Then you decided you were going to follow him around the country playing hide-and-seek."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Reaper hunting."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Whatever."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "There's branding involved."

SCOTT STEVENS: "And somewhere along the way you brought an antique firearm into the building."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Black-powder firearm."

Scott's stare hardens.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Not helping."

SCOTT STEVENS: "No."

The humor drains slightly from Madman's posture.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "He told me no too."

Scott waits.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Three weeks ago."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "I asked him for one more ride."

Madman shrugs.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Old times' sake."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Madman Szalinski."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Chris Ross."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "UTA Championship."

The smile disappears.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "He called it pity."

Scott's expression changes slightly.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Told me I had my chance."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Told me I lost."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Told me to enjoy retirement."

A beat.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "So I stopped asking for pity."

Madman takes one step closer.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "And I gave him a reason."

SCOTT STEVENS: "You attacked him."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Yep."

SCOTT STEVENS: "More than once."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Technically, I think we're starting to lose track of who is attacking who."

SCOTT STEVENS: "I'm not."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Well, you should be."

Madman points down the hallway.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Because he broke into my car."

SCOTT STEVENS: "I heard."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "The back seat, Scott."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Do you know how long that man had to be crouched behind a rental-car seat for that bit to work?"

Scott almost reacts.

Almost.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Commitment."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "I'll give him that."

Then Madman gets serious again.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "But here's the thing."

He taps his own chest.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Chris Ross put my name on his list."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Not me."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Him."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Chris Ross said I don't get to choose when."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "I don't get to choose where."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "I don't get to choose how."

Madman leans slightly toward Scott.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Any time."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Any place."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Anywhere."

A beat.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "His words."

Scott says nothing.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Sounds a whole hell of a lot like a challenge to me."

SCOTT STEVENS: "It sounds like a threat."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "In wrestling that's basically a challenge with better lighting."

Scott rubs the bridge of his nose.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Madman—"

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "No."

That actually stops Stevens.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "No more pity."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "No more 'old times' sake.""

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "No more asking him to do me a favor."

Madman's eyes narrow.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "He wants to collect?"

Madman spreads his arms.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Here I am."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Let him collect."

Scott studies him.

SCOTT STEVENS: "You understand what you're asking for?"

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "A championship match."

SCOTT STEVENS: "No."

Scott steps closer.

SCOTT STEVENS: "I'm asking if you understand who you're asking to fight."

Madman doesn't joke.

SCOTT STEVENS: "You've known Chris Ross a long time."

SCOTT STEVENS: "You know what he's capable of."

SCOTT STEVENS: "And right now, you've spent three weeks deliberately trying to make that man want to hurt you."

Madman slowly nods.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Yeah."

SCOTT STEVENS: "And you're comfortable with where that's going?"

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Comfortable?"

Madman lets out a tiny laugh.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "No."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "I'm fucking terrified."

Scott wasn't expecting that.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "That's how I know I'm alive again."

Silence.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Twelve years, Scott."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Twelve years since I held that championship."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Twelve years of being the guy who almost came back."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "The guy who had one more match."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "One more appearance."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "One more funny story everybody remembers."

He shakes his head.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "I'm done being remembered."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "I want something happening now."

Scott looks at him for a long time.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Fine."

Madman's eyes widen.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Fine?"

SCOTT STEVENS: "Don't get excited."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Too late."

SCOTT STEVENS: "You don't get to challenge for the UTA Championship because you annoyed the champion long enough."

Madman raises one finger.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Shot."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Do not correct me."

Finger goes down.

SCOTT STEVENS: "But..."

Madman waits.

SCOTT STEVENS: "...Chris has been just as involved in this as you have."

SCOTT STEVENS: "He put you on his list."

SCOTT STEVENS: "He's been following you."

SCOTT STEVENS: "He's made it very clear this ends when he decides it ends."

Scott points toward Madman.

SCOTT STEVENS: "So I'm going to give him the opportunity to decide."

Madman's head tilts.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Later tonight."

SCOTT STEVENS: "In the ring."

Madman's grin slowly begins to appear.

SCOTT STEVENS: "You."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Chris."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Me."

SCOTT STEVENS: "And if Chris Ross looks me in the eye and tells me he wants to defend the UTA Championship against you..."

A beat.

SCOTT STEVENS: "...then at Ring King, it's official."

Madman lights up.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Scott Stevens, you handsome son of a bitch—"

SCOTT STEVENS: "Don't."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Professional handshake?"

SCOTT STEVENS: "No."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Fist bump?"

SCOTT STEVENS: "Go away."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Finger guns?"

SCOTT STEVENS: "Madman."

Madman begins backing down the hallway.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Later tonight!"

SCOTT STEVENS: "Yes."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "In the ring!"

SCOTT STEVENS: "Yes."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "UTA Championship!"

SCOTT STEVENS: "IF HE ACCEPTS."

Madman turns the corner.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: (O.S.) "HE'LL ACCEPT!"

Scott exhales.

SCOTT STEVENS: "I hate this job."

He turns to continue down the corridor.

And stops.

The camera widens slightly.

At the far end of the hallway—

Chris Ross is standing there.

The UTA Championship over his shoulder.

He has been there long enough that there is no question.

He heard it.

Scott stares at him.

SCOTT STEVENS: "How much of that did you hear?"

Ross smiles.

That same small, unsettling Reaper smile.

CHRIS ROSS: "Enough."

Scott waits.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Well?"

Ross looks down the hallway where Madman disappeared.

Then at the UTA Championship.

Then back at Scott.

CHRIS ROSS: "He still thinks this is what he wants."

Scott says nothing.

CHRIS ROSS: "That's adorable."

Ross starts walking past him.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Chris."

Ross stops.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Later tonight."

Ross looks over his shoulder.

CHRIS ROSS: "I'll be there."

He continues walking.

Scott watches him go.

As Ross reaches the corner, he stops one final time.

CHRIS ROSS: "Scott."

Stevens looks up.

CHRIS ROSS: "Tell him to enjoy the next couple hours."

That grin returns.

CHRIS ROSS: "In due time..."

Ross disappears around the corner.

Scott stands alone.

Madman wants the Reaper.

The Reaper is coming.

And later tonight, Madison Square Garden will find out whether Ring King becomes the place where he collects.

Cut away.

The Challenge

Segment

The broadcast cuts backstage to the medical area inside Madison Square Garden.

Jed Eye sits on the edge of an examination table.

His tie is gone.

His normally immaculate suit jacket has been removed and folded beside him.

A medical staff member shines a small light into one eye before gently checking the side of his jaw.

Jed winces.

JED EYE: "Yes, thank you. I am fully aware that it is tender."

The medic says something quietly.

JED EYE: "No, I did not fall."

Jed points sharply toward the hallway.

JED EYE: "I was assaulted."

Standing nearby is Yoshii.

The massive former United States Champion has barely moved since the camera arrived.

Arms folded.

Expression serious.

No smile.

JED EYE: "And before anybody attempts to categorize this as some type of unfortunate backstage altercation, I want the terminology documented correctly."

The medic doesn't appear particularly interested in documenting anything beyond Jed's jaw.

JED EYE: "Premeditated assault."

Yoshii looks toward him.

YOSHII: "Jed."

JED EYE: "It was."

YOSHII: "Jed."

Jed stops.

Yoshii shakes his head.

YOSHII: "Enough."

That gets Jed's attention.

JED EYE: "Enough?"

YOSHII: "Yes."

Yoshii unfolds his arms.

YOSHII: "Sinja attack you."

JED EYE: "Correct."

YOSHII: "Yoshii stop Sinja."

JED EYE: "Also correct."

YOSHII: "Before... Hakuryu take championship."

Jed grows quieter.

YOSHII: "Then Ring King."

YOSHII: "Sinja."

YOSHII: "Hakuryu."

YOSHII: "Jed."

He points toward himself.

YOSHII: "Yoshii."

A beat.

YOSHII: "Too much."

Jed looks almost offended by the simplicity of it.

JED EYE: "That's certainly one way of summarizing several weeks of systematic harassment."

Yoshii gives him a look.

JED EYE: "...too much."

The door opens.

Scott Stevens steps inside.

SCOTT STEVENS: "How bad?"

JED EYE: "Potentially catastrophic."

The medic looks at Scott.

Then gives the smallest shake of the head.

SCOTT STEVENS: "So you're fine."

JED EYE: "Medically, perhaps."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Jed."

JED EYE: "My trust in workplace security has been permanently damaged."

Scott ignores him and looks toward Yoshii.

SCOTT STEVENS: "You okay?"

YOSHII: "Yoshii okay."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Good."

Scott glances back at Jed.

SCOTT STEVENS: "I've already spoken to security about what happened outside."

JED EYE: "Wonderful. Perhaps next time they might consider arriving during the assault rather than conducting a retrospective."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Sinja will be dealt with."

Yoshii steps forward.

YOSHII: "No."

Scott looks at him.

YOSHII: "Not Sinja."

Yoshii points to the United States Championship that isn't there.

YOSHII: "Hakuryu."

Jed's eyes immediately sharpen.

JED EYE: "Now, hold on, because if we're discussing contractual remedies—"

YOSHII: "Jed."

Jed stops again.

YOSHII: "Yoshii lost championship."

He taps his own chest.

YOSHII: "Hakuryu beat Yoshii."

There is no excuse in his voice.

No complaint.

YOSHII: "Yoshii respect that."

Jed starts to protest.

YOSHII: "But after?"

Yoshii's face hardens.

YOSHII: "No respect."

YOSHII: "Ring King."

YOSHII: "Jed."

YOSHII: "Sinja."

Yoshii shakes his head.

YOSHII: "Finish."

Scott studies him.

SCOTT STEVENS: "You're asking for Hakuryu."

YOSHII: "Yes."

SCOTT STEVENS: "For the United States Championship."

YOSHII: "Yes."

Jed slides off the examination table.

JED EYE: "For the record, I support this request completely."

SCOTT STEVENS: "I'm shocked."

JED EYE: "The available data strongly supports—"

The room suddenly goes quiet.

Not because Jed stopped himself.

Because Yoshii is looking past Scott.

Toward the open doorway.

Scott notices.

Turns.

Hakuryu stands in the hallway.

Alone.

The United States Championship rests over one shoulder.

No Sinja.

No staff.

No ceremony.

Just The White Dragon.

Jed immediately straightens.

JED EYE: "Oh, excellent."

Hakuryu ignores him.

His eyes settle on Yoshii.

Yoshii looks at the championship.

Then at Hakuryu.

Neither man moves.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Well."

Scott looks between them.

SCOTT STEVENS: "That saves me a trip."

Hakuryu slowly steps into the room.

He stops several feet from Yoshii.

Yoshii towers over him.

Hakuryu doesn't appear remotely concerned.

YOSHII: "Hakuryu."

The White Dragon inclines his head slightly.

YOSHII: "One more."

Yoshii points toward the championship.

YOSHII: "You."

Then himself.

YOSHII: "Yoshii."

A beat.

YOSHII: "No Sinja."

Hakuryu's eyes narrow just slightly.

YOSHII: "No Jed."

JED EYE: "Excuse me?"

Yoshii never looks away from Hakuryu.

YOSHII: "No problem."

YOSHII: "Only fight."

Silence.

Hakuryu slowly brings one hand toward the United States Championship.

His palm rests against the center plate.

Then he speaks.

HAKURYU: "?????????????"

A subtitle appears at the bottom of the screen.

YOU HAVE ALREADY LOST TO ME ONCE.

Yoshii nods.

YOSHII: "Yes."

HAKURYU: "?????????????????"

AND STILL YOU WOULD STAND BEFORE ME AGAIN?

Yoshii takes one step closer.

YOSHII: "Yes."

No hesitation.

Hakuryu studies him.

Then—

a faint smile.

HAKURYU: "?????"

VERY WELL.

Jed immediately looks toward Scott.

JED EYE: "There. Verbal acceptance. Witnessed by management, medical personnel, Yoshii, myself, and presumably several million viewers."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Jed."

JED EYE: "I'm merely establishing the record."

Scott turns toward Hakuryu.

SCOTT STEVENS: "You're agreeing to defend the United States Championship against Yoshii?"

Hakuryu doesn't look at Scott.

His eyes remain on Yoshii.

He nods once.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Then it's done."

Yoshii's expression hardens further.

SCOTT STEVENS: "September twenty-sixth."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Los Angeles."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Ring King."

Scott points toward the championship.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Hakuryu defends the United States Championship against Yoshii."

Jed smiles despite the swelling beginning to form along his jaw.

JED EYE: "Excellent."

Yoshii raises one massive hand.

Jed stops talking.

The former champion and current champion continue staring at one another.

Hakuryu slowly removes the United States Championship from his shoulder.

For a moment it looks like he might raise it.

Instead he holds it between them.

Not offering it.

Displaying it.

Yoshii looks down at the belt he once carried.

Then back into Hakuryu's eyes.

YOSHII: "Yoshii take back."

Hakuryu responds immediately.

HAKURYU: "???????"

IF YOU CAN.

Yoshii's nostrils flare.

But he doesn't attack.

Neither does Hakuryu.

That's the point.

This time, they both want the fight to happen in the ring.

Hakuryu places the championship back over his shoulder.

Then turns toward the doorway.

He takes two steps.

Stops.

His head turns slightly.

Not toward Yoshii.

Toward the empty hallway.

For the briefest moment, Hakuryu appears to expect somebody to be there.

Sinja.

But the hallway is empty.

The White Dragon's expression does not change.

Only his eyes do.

Then he walks away.

Yoshii watches him disappear.

Jed watches too.

JED EYE: "You know, statistically speaking, rematches tend to—"

YOSHII: "Jed."

Jed stops.

YOSHII: "Ice."

Yoshii points toward Jed's jaw.

Jed touches it.

Winces.

JED EYE: "Right."

Scott looks toward Yoshii.

SCOTT STEVENS: "You wanted it."

Yoshii smiles for the first time since the camera arrived.

Not his usual giant grin.

Something much smaller.

Much more serious.

YOSHII: "Yoshii ready."

The broadcast cuts away as a graphic fills the screen.

RING KING 2026

UTA UNITED STATES CHAMPIONSHIP

HAKURYU (c) vs. YOSHII

SEPTEMBER 26 — LOS ANGELES

You Asked for a Shot

Segment

The camera returns to Madison Square Garden.

The lights shift.

The opening notes of "Wildest Dreams" by Taylor Swift hit the speakers.

The reaction is immediate.

Boos pour through the Garden as "CLASSY" BIANCA PAGE steps onto the entrance stage.

Bianca stops beneath the lights.

Smiles.

Blows a kiss toward the crowd.

Then spreads her arms as though Madison Square Garden exists specifically to provide her with an appropriate backdrop.

ACE ANDREWS emerges behind her.

Crisp suit.

Tinted glasses.

The self-satisfied expression of a man who believes whatever is about to happen has already been negotiated in his favor.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Last week, Bianca Page's Ring King dreams came to an end at the hands of Sol Azteca."

MARK BRAVO: "With a little assistance from Emily Hightower."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And Emily would tell you that was repayment."

MARK BRAVO: "Bianca cost Emily her tournament match against Maxwell Jett. Emily returned the favor. That's one apiece."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Except I don't think either woman believes this is even."

Bianca walks slowly down the aisle.

Ace keeps pace beside her.

They enter the ring.

Bianca takes a microphone.

She waits.

The boos continue.

She smiles wider.

BIANCA PAGE: "Madison Square Garden."

The boos rise.

BIANCA PAGE: "You're welcome."

More boos.

Ace laughs beside her.

BIANCA PAGE: "Now that we've gotten the important part out of the way..."

Bianca begins pacing slowly.

BIANCA PAGE: "...there is a certain little matter that needs to be addressed."

She raises one finger.

BIANCA PAGE: "Emily Hightower."

The crowd reacts.

BIANCA PAGE: "A few weeks ago, Emily and I had a conversation."

BIANCA PAGE: "She told me that if she kept winning..."

Bianca gives an exaggerated little shrug.

BIANCA PAGE: "...maybe she'd get to handle me."

Ace smirks.

BIANCA PAGE: "And then something unfortunate happened."

BIANCA PAGE: "She didn't keep winning."

The crowd boos.

BIANCA PAGE: "Maxwell Jett beat her."

Bianca pauses.

BIANCA PAGE: "And before anybody starts crying about how I was standing at ringside..."

She rolls her eyes.

BIANCA PAGE: "...Emily Hightower is a grown woman."

BIANCA PAGE: "If the great, rugged, toughest-dog-in-the-junkyard daughter of David Hightower gets distracted because Bianca Page is standing near her..."

Bianca smiles into the camera.

BIANCA PAGE: "...that sounds like an Emily problem."

MARK BRAVO: "She hit her with the belt."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Bianca appears to have omitted that portion of the evening."

Bianca continues.

BIANCA PAGE: "But then last week..."

Her smile fades.

BIANCA PAGE: "...Emily decided she needed to involve herself in my match."

BIANCA PAGE: "She put her hands on me."

BIANCA PAGE: "She cost me Ring King."

Bianca's jaw tightens.

BIANCA PAGE: "And apparently she thinks that makes us even."

Ace finally raises his own microphone.

ACE ANDREWS: "Which, from a strictly transactional perspective..."

Ace gestures between imaginary columns.

ACE ANDREWS: "...is adorable."

ACE ANDREWS: "Bianca Page did not cost Emily Hightower a championship."

ACE ANDREWS: "She cost her advancement in a tournament."

ACE ANDREWS: "Emily Hightower then cost Bianca advancement in that same tournament."

Ace nods.

ACE ANDREWS: "Ledger balanced."

Bianca looks pleased.

ACE ANDREWS: "Which means there is now another matter to discuss."

Ace looks toward the entrance.

ACE ANDREWS: "Compensation."

Bianca smiles again.

BIANCA PAGE: "Exactly."

She turns toward the hard camera.

BIANCA PAGE: "Emily."

BIANCA PAGE: "You wanted my attention?"

Bianca spreads her arms.

BIANCA PAGE: "You have it."

BIANCA PAGE: "And now I want what I've wanted since I walked into this company."

Bianca slowly points toward her waist.

BIANCA PAGE: "Gold."

The crowd begins buzzing.

BIANCA PAGE: "So let's stop pretending."

BIANCA PAGE: "You cost me my chance at becoming Ring Queen."

BIANCA PAGE: "You wanted to make this personal."

BIANCA PAGE: "Fine."

Bianca steps into the center of the ring.

BIANCA PAGE: "Give me a title shot."

The crowd reacts loudly.

BIANCA PAGE: "Ring King."

Ace nods approvingly.

BIANCA PAGE: "You."

BIANCA PAGE: "Me."

BIANCA PAGE: "Championship on the line."

Bianca lowers the microphone.

Waits.

For several seconds...

nothing.

Then—

? THE OUTSIDERS — ERIC CHURCH ?

Madison Square Garden erupts.

Emily Hightower steps through the curtain.

No truck tonight.

No family.

Just Emily.

And both championships.

The UTA Women's Championship rests over one shoulder.

The UTA Hardcore Championship rests over the other.

Emily looks toward the ring.

Directly at Bianca.

Then starts walking.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Here we go."

MARK BRAVO: "And notice who's NOT walking beside her."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "No David. No Buck. No Dakota."

MARK BRAVO: "Emily said last week that the next time she dealt with Bianca Page, she wasn't taking her eyes off her."

Emily reaches the ring.

She walks up the steps.

Steps between the ropes.

Bianca doesn't move.

Ace takes a few steps backward.

Not leaving.

Just giving the women the center.

Emily takes a microphone.

She looks Bianca over.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "You done?"

Bianca smiles.

BIANCA PAGE: "I've said what I came to say."

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "Good."

Emily adjusts the championships.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "'Cause you talk a lot."

The crowd laughs.

Bianca's smile tightens.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "You wanna talk about ledgers?"

Emily looks toward Ace.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "Fine."

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "You came down during my match."

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "You picked up my belts."

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "You played with 'em."

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "Then you cracked me with one."

Emily takes a step closer.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "So last week..."

She shrugs.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "...I cracked you."

The crowd cheers.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "Now we're even."

Bianca slowly shakes her head.

BIANCA PAGE: "No."

BIANCA PAGE: "We're not."

Bianca points toward Emily's Women's Championship.

BIANCA PAGE: "Because you still have something I want."

Emily looks toward the Women's Championship.

Then back at Bianca.

BIANCA PAGE: "I've been telling this entire company since the day I walked through those doors that championship gold was coming to me."

BIANCA PAGE: "And now that neither one of us has Ring King standing in the way anymore..."

She steps closer.

BIANCA PAGE: "...there's nothing left between Bianca Page and the UTA Women's Championship."

Emily looks at her.

Then at Ace.

Then back at Bianca.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "You want a title shot?"

BIANCA PAGE: "I thought I made that obvious."

Emily nods.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "Alright."

Bianca's eyebrows lift.

Ace's smile widens.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "You got one."

The Garden pops.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Just like that?!"

MARK BRAVO: "Bianca Page wanted gold and Emily Hightower just said yes!"

Bianca laughs.

She looks toward Ace.

Ace nods with enormous satisfaction.

Bianca turns back toward Emily.

BIANCA PAGE: "See?"

She turns toward the crowd.

BIANCA PAGE: "Was that really so difficult?"

Emily hasn't moved.

Bianca points toward the Women's Championship.

BIANCA PAGE: "And at Ring King, when I take that Women's Championship—"

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "Whoa."

Bianca stops.

Emily tilts her head.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "Who said anything about this one?"

Emily taps the UTA Women's Championship.

Bianca's expression freezes.

Ace slowly lowers his microphone.

BIANCA PAGE: "...what?"

Emily smiles.

Then reaches across her body.

She removes the OTHER championship.

The UTA Hardcore Championship.

Emily holds it up between them.

The Garden realizes it before Bianca does.

The reaction builds.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "You asked for a title shot."

Emily looks at the Hardcore Championship.

Then back at Bianca.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "You didn't say which one."

Madison Square Garden explodes.

MARK BRAVO: "HAHA! OH, BIANCA!"

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Emily Hightower just pulled the rug out from underneath her!"

Bianca looks genuinely stunned.

BIANCA PAGE: "No."

Emily raises an eyebrow.

BIANCA PAGE: "No, no, no."

She points furiously toward the Women's Championship.

BIANCA PAGE: "You know exactly what I meant."

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "Sure do."

BIANCA PAGE: "I want the Women's Championship."

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "I know."

BIANCA PAGE: "Then what the hell is this?"

Emily looks down at the Hardcore Championship.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "This?"

She lifts it slightly.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "This is what happens when you decide to put your hands on my business."

The crowd cheers.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "You wanted my attention."

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "You got it."

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "You wanted some gold."

Emily holds the Hardcore Championship directly in front of Bianca.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "Here's some gold."

Bianca stares at it.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "You wanted to get involved in my business?"

Emily's grin disappears.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "Now you're gettin' all of it."

Ace steps forward.

ACE ANDREWS: "Emily, perhaps we should slow down for just one moment."

Emily turns her head toward him.

ACE ANDREWS: "Bianca asked for an opportunity at the premier championship of the women's division."

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "No."

Ace stops.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "Bianca asked for a title shot."

Emily looks back at Bianca.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "I'm givin' her one."

ACE ANDREWS: "That's an intentionally dishonest interpretation."

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "Yeah."

Emily shrugs.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "Ain't it fun?"

The crowd laughs.

Ace's expression tightens.

Bianca doesn't laugh.

BIANCA PAGE: "You think this is funny?"

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "Little bit."

BIANCA PAGE: "You think putting me in some garbage wrestling match scares me?"

Emily's smile disappears immediately.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "No."

A beat.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "I think you should be scared of me."

The building reacts.

Bianca steps forward.

Ace reaches one hand toward her shoulder.

Bianca brushes him off.

BIANCA PAGE: "Emily..."

Bianca points at the Hardcore Championship.

BIANCA PAGE: "I have wrestled all over this industry."

BIANCA PAGE: "I've been a world champion."

BIANCA PAGE: "I've beaten women better than you."

BIANCA PAGE: "I've beaten men better than you."

BIANCA PAGE: "So if you think throwing a few chairs around is going to keep Bianca Page away from championship gold..."

Bianca moves nose-to-nose with Emily.

BIANCA PAGE: "...you're even dumber than you look."

Emily smiles again.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "There she is."

Bianca looks confused.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "That's what I wanted."

BIANCA PAGE: "What?"

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "You say yes."

Bianca's expression changes.

Realization.

Emily just baited her into accepting.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "Ring King."

Emily lifts the Hardcore Championship.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "You and me."

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "Hardcore Championship."

A beat.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "No excuses."

Bianca stares at her.

Ace leans toward Bianca.

ACE ANDREWS: "Bianca—"

Bianca holds one hand up.

Ace stops.

Bianca's eyes never leave Emily.

BIANCA PAGE: "Fine."

The crowd roars.

BIANCA PAGE: "Hardcore Championship."

BIANCA PAGE: "Ring King."

Bianca smiles.

Slowly.

BIANCA PAGE: "And when I beat you..."

She points toward the Women's Championship.

BIANCA PAGE: "...I'm coming for that one next."

Emily doesn't hesitate.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "Then survive the first one."

The crowd pops again.

Bianca's smile disappears.

The two women stand inches apart.

Emily raises the Hardcore Championship between them.

Bianca reaches up.

Places one hand on the bottom of the championship.

Emily's eyes immediately drop toward Bianca's hand.

Bianca remembers what happened the last time she touched Emily's gold.

Slowly...

she releases it.

BIANCA PAGE: "Two weeks."

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "Clock's tickin'."

Bianca backs away.

Ace joins her.

Neither leaves the ring immediately.

Bianca continues staring at Emily.

Not the Hardcore Championship.

The Women's Championship.

Emily notices.

She deliberately adjusts that belt higher on her opposite shoulder.

A reminder.

This match isn't for the prize Bianca really wants.

Not yet.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "It is official! At Ring King, Emily Hightower will defend the UTA Hardcore Championship against Bianca Page!"

MARK BRAVO: "And Bianca Page just learned something very important. Be careful how you word a challenge when Emily Hightower is carrying two championships."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "But listen to what Bianca said. She hasn't abandoned her pursuit of the Women's Championship."

MARK BRAVO: "She may want that one, John. But first she's gotta survive the Junkyard Bitch when the rules disappear."

Emily lifts the Hardcore Championship.

Bianca stands across from her with Ace Andrews whispering something into her ear.

The graphic fills the screen.

RING KING 2026

UTA HARDCORE CHAMPIONSHIP

EMILY HIGHTOWER (c) vs. "CLASSY" BIANCA PAGE

SEPTEMBER 26 — LOS ANGELES

Keep it Warm

Segment

The broadcast cuts backstage.

Near gorilla position.

The muffled roar of Madison Square Garden bleeds through the curtain as production personnel move around the narrow staging area.

One man is already dressed for competition.

Silver trunks.

Silver boots.

Wrists and fingers meticulously taped.

And because simply being dressed to wrestle apparently isn't enough...

ERIC DANE JR. has completed the ensemble with wraparound sunglasses, a sequined headband, and an unnecessarily extravagant silver-and-blue robe covered in stars.

Eric adjusts one wrist.

Looks at it.

Adjusts it again.

Perfect.

He turns toward the curtain.

Then stops.

Because sitting on a nearby equipment case is...

"Beautiful" Bobby Dean.

The UTA International Championship rests over Bobby's shoulder.

Bobby isn't eating.

Isn't polishing the championship.

Isn't talking to it.

He's watching one of the nearby monitors.

Eric smiles.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Well, well, well."

Bobby looks over.

BOBBY DEAN: "Hi, Eric."

Eric spreads his arms.

ERIC DANE JR.: "What do you think?"

Bobby looks at him.

Then at the robe.

Then the headband.

Then the sunglasses.

BOBBY DEAN: "That's a lot."

Eric's smile fades slightly.

ERIC DANE JR.: "It's called presentation."

BOBBY DEAN: "Oh."

Bobby nods.

BOBBY DEAN: "Then it's very present."

Eric stares at him.

Bobby stares back.

There is absolutely no indication Bobby realizes what he just said.

Eric decides to move on.

ERIC DANE JR.: "You know what? This is actually perfect."

Eric steps closer.

ERIC DANE JR.: "You're here."

ERIC DANE JR.: "I'm here."

ERIC DANE JR.: "And I just happen to have a match."

Bobby looks toward the curtain.

BOBBY DEAN: "I heard."

ERIC DANE JR.: "Good."

Eric points toward the monitor.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Then watch."

Bobby looks back at him.

BOBBY DEAN: "Okay."

Eric pauses.

ERIC DANE JR.: "That's it?"

BOBBY DEAN: "What?"

ERIC DANE JR.: "You're not gonna ask why?"

Bobby thinks about it.

BOBBY DEAN: "Why?"

Eric smiles again.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Because in two weeks..."

Eric taps the center plate of the International Championship.

Bobby's eyes immediately drop toward Eric's hand.

Eric notices.

His smile grows.

ERIC DANE JR.: "...you're getting in the ring with me."

ERIC DANE JR.: "And Bobby, we've spent months talking about you."

Eric gestures toward him.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Whether you're a joke."

ERIC DANE JR.: "Whether you deserve that."

ERIC DANE JR.: "Whether you're really a champion."

Bobby's expression tightens slightly.

ERIC DANE JR.: "But you know what nobody's been talking enough about?"

Eric taps his own chest.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Me."

Bobby blinks.

BOBBY DEAN: "You talk about you a lot."

Eric's jaw tightens.

ERIC DANE JR.: "That's because somebody has to."

Bobby shrugs.

ERIC DANE JR.: "September twenty-sixth isn't some inspirational story about Bobby Dean finally believing in himself."

ERIC DANE JR.: "It's not about Mikey giving you pep talks."

ERIC DANE JR.: "It's not about Mike Best finding your inner killer."

Bobby's eyes sharpen at that one.

ERIC DANE JR.: "It's about the International Championship finally ending up where it belongs."

Eric points to himself.

ERIC DANE JR.: "On a superstar."

Bobby looks at Eric.

Then down at the championship.

His fingers close around the bottom of the belt.

ERIC DANE JR.: "You wanna know what a real International Champion is supposed to look like?"

Eric starts backing toward gorilla.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Don't move."

He points toward the monitor.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Watch."

Bobby looks at the screen.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Watch the entrance."

ERIC DANE JR.: "Watch the people."

ERIC DANE JR.: "Watch what happens when somebody walks into Madison Square Garden and everybody in the building knows they're looking at a star."

Eric turns toward the curtain.

ERIC DANE JR.: "And then watch the match."

He looks back over his shoulder.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Because I'm gonna show you exactly what happens when somebody like you gets into the ring with somebody like me."

Bobby remains seated.

Quiet.

Eric waits for something.

Fear.

Anger.

A joke.

Anything.

BOBBY DEAN: "Okay."

Eric lowers his sunglasses.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Okay?"

BOBBY DEAN: "Yeah."

Bobby points toward the monitor.

BOBBY DEAN: "I'll watch."

Eric studies him.

Something about Bobby's tone isn't satisfying.

Not because it's defiant.

Because it isn't.

Bobby genuinely intends to watch.

Study.

Learn.

Eric doesn't seem to realize that.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Good."

Eric slides the sunglasses back into place.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Maybe you'll learn something."

He turns toward gorilla.

A stagehand holds up five fingers.

Eric rolls his shoulders.

Four.

He adjusts the robe.

Three.

Eric turns back one final time.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Oh, Bobby?"

Bobby looks over.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Keep my belt warm."

Bobby looks down at the International Championship.

Then back at Eric.

BOBBY DEAN: "It's mine."

Eric stops.

Just for a second.

Bobby doesn't smile.

Doesn't raise his voice.

He simply adjusts the championship higher on his shoulder.

BOBBY DEAN: "But I'll keep it warm."

Eric's mouth curls into a smirk.

ERIC DANE JR.: "Two weeks."

BOBBY DEAN: "Yep."

The stagehand points.

GO.

Eric Dane Jr. turns and steps through the curtain.

The roar of Madison Square Garden suddenly floods the backstage area.

Bobby remains on the equipment case.

His eyes move to the monitor.

The International Championship stays firmly over his shoulder.

And this time...

Bobby Dean watches.

Closely.

The broadcast cuts directly to the arena.

Ring King

Segment

The arena fades to black.

For a moment, there is no music.

Only a single sound.

THUMP.

A heartbeat.

THUMP.

The screen slowly comes alive.

A golden crown sits alone beneath a narrow spotlight.

Behind it...

the Ring King throne.

Empty.

Waiting.

ON SCREEN:

16 ENTERED.

8 SURVIVED.

4 WILL REMAIN.

The music begins.

Low percussion.

Slow strings.

Then footage begins to flash.

Chris Ross.

Samuel Scythe.

Bobby Dean.

Mikey Unlikely.

Emily Hightower.

Hakuryu.

The six champions automatically entered into the tournament.

Then the qualifiers.

Kirsty McKinney.

Bianca Page.

Lindsey Lothario.

Mike Best.

Maxwell Jett.

Selina Santorino.

Sol Azteca.

Yoshii.

Madman Szalinski.

Marie Van Claudio.

NARRATOR: "Sixteen names."

NARRATOR: "Champions."

NARRATOR: "Veterans."

NARRATOR: "Rising stars."

NARRATOR: "And men and women desperate to become something more."

The footage accelerates.

Sol Azteca fighting through Selina Santorino.

Bianca Page stealing victory from Lindsey Lothario.

Samuel Scythe crushing Madman Szalinski.

Mikey Unlikely surviving Chris Ross.

Madman appearing from nowhere.

The chair crashing across Ross.

Ross collapsing outside the ring.

Mikey being declared the winner without understanding what had just happened.

NARRATOR: "Round One did not ask who was ready."

NARRATOR: "It asked who could survive."

Quick cuts.

Kirsty McKinney trapping Hakuryu.

Sinja's powder exploding into Hakuryu's face.

Maxwell Jett surviving Emily Hightower after Bianca's interference.

Marie Van Claudio standing over Maxx Mayhem.

Mike Best driving Bobby Dean down with I KNEED A HERO!

The referee counts three.

Then Mike helping Bobby back to his feet.

MIKE BEST: "Don't lose that again."

The screen cuts to black.

THUMP.

Then Round Two.

Sol Azteca and Bianca Page trading counters.

Bianca attacking the leg.

Emily Hightower appearing at ringside.

The forearm.

Bianca going down.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "Now we're even."

Corona Strike.

Luz Final.

Bianca taps.

ON SCREEN:

SOL AZTECA — FINAL FOUR

The music grows louder.

Samuel Scythe mauling Mikey Unlikely.

Mikey surviving Reaper's Blade.

Scythe overpowering him again.

Mikey hanging on.

Ace Andrews shouting from ringside.

Scythe colliding with Ace.

Inside cradle.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

ON SCREEN:

MIKEY UNLIKELY — FINAL FOUR

Tonight.

Madison Square Garden.

Kirsty McKinney standing across from Maxwell Jett.

Maxwell laughing.

Kirsty refusing to be rattled.

The match becoming increasingly desperate.

Maxwell looking toward ringside.

No Jacoby.

No Darian.

No help.

Kirsty catching him.

The final three count.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

Kirsty sits up.

Exhausted.

Victorious.

ON SCREEN:

KIRSTY McKINNEY — FINAL FOUR

The music suddenly cuts.

Maxwell Jett backstage.

Angry.

Humiliated.

MAXWELL JETT: "Call him."

Jacoby and Darian stare back.

MAXWELL JETT: "Tell him it's time."

Black.

THUMP.

The tournament bracket appears.

SOL AZTECA

MIKEY UNLIKELY

KIRSTY McKINNEY

???

The fourth position burns gold.

NARRATOR: "Three have reached the final four."

NARRATOR: "One place remains."

Marie Van Claudio appears.

Images of The Empire surrounding her.

Marie standing in the middle of the ring.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "I will not become Ring King."

She smiles.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "I will become Ring QUEEN."

Cut.

Mike Best.

The Hall of Fame ring.

The stare.

I KNEED A HERO! crushing Bobby Dean.

MIKE BEST: "I'm the Son of GOD."

Another hit.

MIKE BEST: "I'm a Hall of Famer."

Another.

MIKE BEST: "I'm Mike Best."

ON SCREEN:

TONIGHT

ROUND TWO

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO

vs.

MIKE BEST

WINNER COMPLETES THE FINAL FOUR

The music shifts.

The tournament disappears.

The Ring King logo remains.

Then championship gold begins appearing around it.

NARRATOR: "But a crown will not be the only thing fought for in Los Angeles."

Bobby Dean appears with the UTA International Championship.

Eric Dane Jr. laughs in his face.

ERIC DANE JR.: "You don't deserve that championship."

Bobby punches Eric.

CRACK!

Eric crashes to the floor.

BOBBY DEAN: "Make me prove it."

Tonight's footage.

Eric annihilating Darren Valiant.

SD2.

Eric pulling Darren's shoulder up.

SD3.

Three count.

Eric pointing directly into the camera.

ERIC DANE JR.: "THAT'S YOUR FUTURE, BOBBY."

ON SCREEN:

UTA INTERNATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

BOBBY DEAN (c)

vs.

ERIC DANE JR.

Cut.

Hakuryu.

The United States Championship.

Yoshii staring across at him.

Sinja throwing powder.

The powder hitting Hakuryu.

Tonight's parking-lot attack.

Sinja driving Jed Eye into the SUV.

Yoshii pulling Sinja away.

Hakuryu appearing behind his disciple.

HAKURYU: "?????"

STRIKE ONE.

Later tonight.

Yoshii and Hakuryu face-to-face.

YOSHII: "One more."

HAKURYU: "?????"

VERY WELL.

ON SCREEN:

UTA UNITED STATES CHAMPIONSHIP

HAKURYU (c)

vs.

YOSHII

Cut.

Bianca Page lifting Emily Hightower's championship.

Bianca striking Emily with the belt.

Emily later drilling Bianca with a forearm.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "Now we're even."

Tonight.

Bianca pointing toward the Women's Championship.

BIANCA PAGE: "Give me a title shot."

Emily smiling.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "You got one."

Bianca grinning.

Emily removing the other championship.

The Hardcore Championship.

EMILY HIGHTOWER: "You didn't say which one."

ON SCREEN:

UTA HARDCORE CHAMPIONSHIP

EMILY HIGHTOWER (c)

vs.

"CLASSY" BIANCA PAGE

The music slows.

Darkens.

A chair drags across concrete.

Madman Szalinski.

The antique musket.

Chris Ross.

The UTA Championship.

Madman attacking Ross during the tournament.

Ross being driven into the wall.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Anytime, anywhere, the Madness can strike too!"

Chris Ross laughing.

CHRIS ROSS: "Good one, Madman."

Ross slowly looks toward the camera.

CHRIS ROSS: "Tick tock."

Madman earlier tonight.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "I'm fucking terrified."

A pause.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "That's how I know I'm alive again."

Scott Stevens.

SCOTT STEVENS: "If Chris looks me in the eye tonight and tells me he wants to defend the UTA Championship against you..."

Madman's expression changes.

SCOTT STEVENS: "...then at Ring King, it's official."

Cut to Chris Ross standing down the hallway.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Well?"

CHRIS ROSS: "He still thinks this is what he wants."

Ross smiles.

CHRIS ROSS: "That's adorable."

Black.

THUMP.

ON SCREEN:

LATER TONIGHT

CHRIS ROSS

MADMAN SZALINSKI

SCOTT STEVENS

IN THE RING

WILL THE UTA CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH BECOME OFFICIAL?

The music begins building one final time.

Quick cuts.

Sol.

Mikey.

Kirsty.

Marie.

Mike.

Ross.

Madman.

Bobby.

Eric.

Hakuryu.

Yoshii.

Emily.

Bianca.

The empty throne.

The crown.

NARRATOR: "Two weeks."

The Crypto.com Arena flashes onto the screen.

NARRATOR: "One night."

The crown slowly rises from the throne.

NARRATOR: "One throne."

The music hits its final crescendo.

RING KING 2026

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 26

CRYPTO.COM ARENA

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

The crown slams down over the Ring King logo.

WHO WILL BE CROWNED?

Cut to black.

The Reaper Answers

Segment

The Ring King video package fades to black.

Madison Square Garden remains dark for several seconds.

Then—

? "HELLRAISER" — MOTÖRHEAD & OZZY OSBOURNE ?

The crowd rises as SCOTT STEVENS steps onto the stage.

No smile.

No theatrics.

Microphone already in hand.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Earlier tonight, Scott Stevens gave Madman Szalinski exactly one path to the UTA Championship."

MARK BRAVO: "If Chris Ross comes down here, looks Scott Stevens in the eye, and says he wants Madman Szalinski at Ring King..."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "...then the match becomes official."

MARK BRAVO: "And considering everything Madman has done to force this issue, I'm not sure whether that's what he wants anymore."

Scott walks down the aisle.

Enters the ring.

His music fades.

The Garden buzzes.

SCOTT STEVENS: "I'm gonna keep this simple."

The crowd quiets.

SCOTT STEVENS: "There has been enough chasing."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Enough hiding in cars."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Enough ambushes."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Enough muskets."

A laugh rolls through the crowd.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Especially enough goddamn muskets."

The laughter grows.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Madman Szalinski."

Scott points toward the entrance.

SCOTT STEVENS: "You wanted this."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Come get in the ring."

A beat.

Then the arena lights shift.

The reaction begins before Madman even appears.

MADMAN SZALINSKI steps through the curtain.

Mask on.

No musket.

No chair.

No weapon of any kind.

For once.

Madman pauses at the top of the ramp.

Looks around Madison Square Garden.

Then slowly points toward Scott.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "See?"

Madman spreads his arms.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Responsible adult."

The crowd laughs.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Get in the ring."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "I'm coming."

Madman starts down the ramp.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "You don't have to be so hostile."

Scott just stares.

Madman climbs the steps.

Enters the ring.

Scott hands him a microphone.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Thank you."

Scott does not respond.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "You're welcome."

Madman turns toward the crowd.

The joking energy remains for another second.

Then disappears.

He looks toward the entrance.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Chris."

The crowd reacts.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "We've been doing this for weeks."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Actually..."

Madman tilts his head.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "...I've been doing this for weeks."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "You've mostly been appearing behind me like some kind of Pennsylvania horror-movie asshole."

Another reaction.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "But here we are."

Madman's voice settles.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "I asked you once."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Remember?"

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Old times' sake."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Madman Szalinski."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Chris Ross."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "UTA Championship."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "One more ride."

Madman lowers his head slightly.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "And you told me no."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "You told me you weren't handing out pity shots."

The crowd quiets.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "You told me I lost."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "You told me I proved I could still do this."

A pause.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Then you told me to enjoy retirement."

Madman looks straight toward the stage.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "So I stopped asking."

A beat.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "And I started giving you reasons."

The crowd reacts.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "I cost you Ring King."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "You put me on your little list."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "You broke into my rental car."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "I hunted you with a Revolutionary War musket."

Madman pauses.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Which, in hindsight..."

He nods slowly.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "...may have gotten away from me."

The crowd laughs.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Then I shot you in the face."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Accidentally."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Accidentally."

Madman raises one finger.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Important legal distinction."

SCOTT STEVENS: "And then you knocked him into a wall."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "That part was on purpose."

Scott closes his eyes.

Madman looks back toward the entrance.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "But none of that matters anymore."

The joking tone leaves completely.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Because I'm here."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "You're here."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "And the only thing standing between me and the match I've spent the last month trying to force into existence..."

Madman looks toward Scott.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "...is Chris Ross saying yes."

Madman turns toward the entrance.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "So come on, Reaper."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "I'm done hunting."

A beat.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Come collect."

The Garden erupts.

Silence.

Then—

? "BLACK FLAME" — BURY TOMORROW ?

Red.

White.

Blue.

Police lights begin flickering throughout Madison Square Garden.

The titantron shows the streets of Harrisburg.

Wet pavement.

Alleys.

Flashing lights.

Then CHRIS ROSS emerges.

The UTA Championship rests across his shoulder.

Long black jacket.

Messy hair.

That same unsettling smile.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "There is the UTA Champion."

MARK BRAVO: "And look at him."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Madman wanted Chris Ross angry."

MARK BRAVO: "I don't think he got angry."

Ross begins walking.

Slowly.

No rush.

His eyes never leave Madman.

Madman watches him approach.

The grin beneath the mask starts to disappear.

Ross reaches the ring.

Slides underneath the bottom rope.

Then walks directly past Madman.

No confrontation.

No shove.

No cheap shot.

Ross walks to the far corner.

Sits against the turnbuckles.

The UTA Championship remains over his shoulder.

His music fades.

Madman looks at Scott.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Does he normally do this part sitting down?"

Ross smiles.

CHRIS ROSS: "Keep talking."

Madman turns.

CHRIS ROSS: "That's what you've been doing this whole time."

Ross slowly stands.

CHRIS ROSS: "Talking."

CHRIS ROSS: "Running."

CHRIS ROSS: "Scheming."

CHRIS ROSS: "Hiding."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "I have not been hiding."

CHRIS ROSS: "No?"

Ross begins slowly walking toward him.

CHRIS ROSS: "You attacked me during my Ring King match."

CHRIS ROSS: "Then you hid under a hood."

CHRIS ROSS: "You came looking for me with a gun."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Musket."

CHRIS ROSS: "Whatever."

Ross keeps walking.

CHRIS ROSS: "You shot me."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Accidentally."

CHRIS ROSS: "Then ran."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Strategic relocation."

Ross stops.

Stares at him.

CHRIS ROSS: "See?"

Madman tilts his head.

CHRIS ROSS: "That's what I mean."

Ross looks toward Scott.

CHRIS ROSS: "He still thinks this is funny."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "No."

The answer comes quicker than expected.

Ross turns back.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "I don't."

A pause.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "I'm scared shitless."

The crowd reacts.

Ross's smile widens.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "I told Scott that earlier."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "I'm terrified."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "And that's exactly why I'm standing here."

Madman steps forward.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Because I haven't felt this alive in twelve goddamn years."

The crowd swells.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Twelve years since I held that championship."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Twelve years of comebacks."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "One-night appearances."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Hall of Fame shit."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "People telling stories about who Madman Szalinski used to be."

Madman points at Ross's championship.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "I don't wanna be remembered anymore."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "I want something happening now."

Huge reaction.

Ross slowly nods.

CHRIS ROSS: "Yeah."

Madman waits.

CHRIS ROSS: "I know."

Ross takes another step.

CHRIS ROSS: "That's the part you don't understand."

Madman's expression changes slightly.

CHRIS ROSS: "You think you've been hunting me."

Ross points toward Madman.

CHRIS ROSS: "You think you figured out how to get under my skin."

CHRIS ROSS: "You think every chair shot..."

CHRIS ROSS: "...every attack..."

CHRIS ROSS: "...every stupid little game..."

Ross's voice gets quieter.

CHRIS ROSS: "...was you getting closer to me."

A pause.

CHRIS ROSS: "Madman..."

Ross smiles.

CHRIS ROSS: "...I've just been letting you show me where all your traps are."

The Garden reacts.

Madman becomes very still.

CHRIS ROSS: "Every time you got excited..."

Ross raises one finger.

CHRIS ROSS: "...you showed me something."

CHRIS ROSS: "Every time you got scared..."

A second finger.

CHRIS ROSS: "...you showed me something."

CHRIS ROSS: "Every time you got desperate..."

Third finger.

CHRIS ROSS: "...you showed me something."

Ross steps closer.

CHRIS ROSS: "Every time you thought you'd outsmarted me..."

The smile disappears.

CHRIS ROSS: "...you showed me something."

Madman says nothing.

CHRIS ROSS: "Your car."

CHRIS ROSS: "The hallways."

CHRIS ROSS: "The gun."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Musket."

CHRIS ROSS: "The fucking musket."

The crowd laughs.

Ross doesn't.

CHRIS ROSS: "All of it."

CHRIS ROSS: "You thought you were making me want this match."

Ross looks down at the UTA Championship.

Then back up.

CHRIS ROSS: "I've been deciding whether you're worth having it."

Madman's eyes narrow.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "And?"

Ross smiles.

CHRIS ROSS: "Oh, you are."

The Garden erupts.

Madman's entire posture changes.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "There it is."

Madman points toward Scott.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "You hear that?"

SCOTT STEVENS: "I heard it."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Say it."

Ross laughs.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Come on."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Say it."

Madman steps directly in front of Ross.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "You want Madman Szalinski."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "You want Ring King."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "You want the UTA Championship on the line."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Say it."

Ross studies him.

Long enough that Madman's excitement starts becoming uncomfortable.

CHRIS ROSS: "You still don't get it."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Then explain it."

Ross leans closer.

CHRIS ROSS: "You're not getting a title shot because you earned one."

Madman's jaw tightens.

CHRIS ROSS: "You're not getting one because I feel sorry for you."

CHRIS ROSS: "You're not getting one because we're old buddies."

CHRIS ROSS: "You're getting one..."

Ross taps Madman lightly in the chest.

CHRIS ROSS: "...because you put your name on my list."

Huge reaction.

CHRIS ROSS: "And you kept poking."

CHRIS ROSS: "And poking."

CHRIS ROSS: "And poking."

CHRIS ROSS: "Until you finally convinced yourself that getting Chris Ross angry was the same thing as getting Chris Ross vulnerable."

Ross shakes his head.

CHRIS ROSS: "Wrong."

A beat.

CHRIS ROSS: "You didn't make me angry."

Ross smiles.

CHRIS ROSS: "You made me interested."

Madman swallows.

CHRIS ROSS: "So Scott..."

Ross finally turns toward Stevens.

CHRIS ROSS: "You wanted me to look you in the eye."

Scott steps forward.

Ross does exactly that.

CHRIS ROSS: "I want him."

The Garden erupts.

Madman immediately throws both arms into the air.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "YES!"

Ross never stops looking at Scott.

CHRIS ROSS: "Ring King."

CHRIS ROSS: "UTA Championship."

CHRIS ROSS: "Madman Szalinski."

Ross slowly turns toward Madman.

CHRIS ROSS: "No pity."

Madman's celebration slows.

CHRIS ROSS: "No nostalgia."

CHRIS ROSS: "No old times' sake."

Ross takes one final step forward.

CHRIS ROSS: "Just you."

CHRIS ROSS: "Me."

CHRIS ROSS: "And the consequences of everything you've done to get here."

Scott raises the microphone.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Then it's official."

The crowd gets louder.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Saturday, September twenty-sixth."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Crypto.com Arena."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Los Angeles, California."

SCOTT STEVENS: "At Ring King..."

Scott points toward Ross's championship.

SCOTT STEVENS: "...Chris Ross will defend the UTA Championship against Madman Szalinski."

Madison Square Garden explodes.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "IT'S OFFICIAL!"

MARK BRAVO: "Madman Szalinski finally got what he wanted!"

Madman laughs.

Not the manic laugh from earlier weeks.

Relief.

Vindication.

He points toward the crowd.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "TWELVE YEARS!"

Madman turns toward Ross.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Twelve goddamn years, Chris!"

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "You told me to enjoy retirement!"

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Now I'm fighting for that!"

He points at the UTA Championship.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "At Ring King!"

Ross simply watches him.

Smiling.

Madman's celebration slows again.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "...what?"

Ross says nothing.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Why are you looking at me like that?"

Ross lifts the microphone.

CHRIS ROSS: "Because..."

Ross adjusts the UTA Championship on his shoulder.

CHRIS ROSS: "...you think tonight is the night you won."

Madman stops smiling.

CHRIS ROSS: "You think all the stupid shit worked."

CHRIS ROSS: "You think you pushed me until I finally cracked."

Ross chuckles.

CHRIS ROSS: "Madman..."

Ross steps close enough that the UTA Championship nearly touches Madman's chest.

CHRIS ROSS: "...I never cracked."

A beat.

CHRIS ROSS: "I opened the door."

The crowd reacts.

Madman says nothing.

CHRIS ROSS: "And you walked right through it."

Ross lowers his voice.

CHRIS ROSS: "All by yourself."

Madman's eyes shift.

For the first time since Scott made the match official...

he doesn't look happy.

Ross slowly lifts the UTA Championship from his shoulder.

Raises it between them.

CHRIS ROSS: "You wanted your shot."

Ross raises the title higher.

CHRIS ROSS: "You got it."

A pause.

CHRIS ROSS: "Now comes the part you never thought about."

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "What's that?"

The Reaper smiles.

CHRIS ROSS: "Surviving it."

The crowd explodes.

Madman stares at Ross.

Then slowly...

the smile returns beneath his mask.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "There he is."

Madman steps closer.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "That's the guy I wanted."

CHRIS ROSS: "No."

Madman's smile pauses.

CHRIS ROSS: "That's the guy you asked for."

Ross taps the center plate.

CHRIS ROSS: "This is the guy you're getting."

Madman nods.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Good."

A beat.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "Because I didn't spend twelve years waiting to fight somebody safe."

The crowd roars.

Ross's grin grows.

CHRIS ROSS: "Good."

He leans closer.

CHRIS ROSS: "Then don't blink."

The two men stand forehead-to-forehead.

Scott Stevens remains between them just enough to prevent either man from moving forward.

Neither throws a punch.

Neither needs to.

Ross finally steps backward.

Madman doesn't move.

CHRIS ROSS: "You wanted anytime."

Ross begins backing toward the ropes.

CHRIS ROSS: "You wanted any place."

Ross steps through the ropes onto the apron.

CHRIS ROSS: "You wanted anywhere."

Ross drops to the floor.

Looks back into the ring.

CHRIS ROSS: "September twenty-sixth."

Ross points toward Madman.

CHRIS ROSS: "In due time..."

That Reaper smile spreads across his face.

CHRIS ROSS: "...I collect."

? "BLACK FLAME" — BURY TOMORROW ?

The music hits.

Police lights flood Madison Square Garden.

Ross raises the UTA Championship on the floor.

Inside the ring...

Madman Szalinski watches him.

Scott Stevens says something to Madman off-microphone.

Madman doesn't respond.

His eyes remain locked on Ross.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Madman Szalinski wanted one more opportunity at the UTA Championship."

MARK BRAVO: "He got it."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "But I don't think Chris Ross sees this as a championship defense."

MARK BRAVO: "No, John."

Ross slowly walks backward up the aisle, never turning his back on Madman.

MARK BRAVO: "Chris Ross sees it as collection day."

The screen fills with the official graphic.

RING KING 2026

UTA CHAMPIONSHIP

CHRIS ROSS (c)

vs.

MADMAN SZALINSKI

SEPTEMBER 26 — LOS ANGELES

The graphic fades.

Madman remains in the ring.

Still watching the champion disappear.

He finally lowers his microphone.

Looks down.

Then laughs quietly to himself.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: "God damn, son."

Fade.

Missing

Segment

The broadcast cuts backstage.

Inside The Empire locker room.

For the second time tonight...

Marie Van Claudio stands in the center of it.

But the room looks different now.

Earlier, there were five.

Now there are three.

Marie.

Amy Harrison.

Valkyrie Knox.

No Trey Mack.

No Clovis Black.

Marie is completely dressed for competition.

Boots laced.

Wrists taped.

Hair set.

Everything exactly where it should be.

Except two people.

Marie checks the time on the wall clock.

Then looks toward the door.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Where are they?"

Amy Harrison is leaning against a locker.

Arms folded.

She doesn't pretend not to understand the question.

AMY HARRISON: "Who?"

Marie slowly turns her head.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Don't."

Amy smiles faintly.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Trey."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Clovis."

Amy gives a small shrug.

AMY HARRISON: "Haven't seen them."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "I told Trey he wasn't coming to ringside."

Marie points toward the floor.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "I didn't tell him to disappear."

AMY HARRISON: "Maybe he needed some space."

Marie scoffs.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Space."

AMY HARRISON: "You did tell him he hasn't been pulling his weight."

Marie looks at Amy.

AMY HARRISON: "People can be sensitive."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Trey Mack is two hundred and ninety pounds."

AMY HARRISON: "Very sensitive."

Valkyrie Knox stands near the door.

Silent.

Stoic.

Watching both women.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "And Clovis?"

Amy's smile changes.

Smaller.

Sharper.

AMY HARRISON: "Clovis made his choice."

Marie stares at her.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Excuse me?"

AMY HARRISON: "Earlier."

Amy pushes herself away from the locker.

AMY HARRISON: "You told him to come with us."

AMY HARRISON: "He stayed with Trey."

A pause.

AMY HARRISON: "That looked like a choice to me."

Marie's jaw tightens.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Clovis is part of The Empire."

AMY HARRISON: "So is Trey."

Marie takes one step toward Amy.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Are you trying to make a point?"

AMY HARRISON: "No."

Amy smiles.

AMY HARRISON: "I'm trying to keep you from making one."

Marie stares at her.

Amy gestures toward the door.

AMY HARRISON: "Mike Best."

That name resets the room.

Marie looks toward the door.

Then away.

AMY HARRISON: "You said it yourself earlier."

AMY HARRISON: "Hall of Famer."

AMY HARRISON: "Just beat Bobby Dean clean."

AMY HARRISON: "One mistake and your night's over."

Amy tilts her head.

AMY HARRISON: "So maybe stop worrying about two men who aren't here..."

She gestures toward Marie.

AMY HARRISON: "...and start worrying about the one waiting for you out there."

Marie says nothing.

Valkyrie finally speaks.

VALKYRIE KNOX: "Focus."

One word.

That's all.

Marie looks toward her.

Valkyrie stares back.

No judgment.

No challenge.

Just fact.

Marie exhales.

Slowly.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Fine."

She reaches for her entrance jacket.

Pulls it on.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Mike Best."

Marie adjusts the collar.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "UTA Hall of Famer."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Son of GOD."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Beat Bobby Dean."

She looks at herself in the mirror.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Good for him."

Amy raises an eyebrow.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Because when this night ends..."

Marie turns away from the mirror.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "...people aren't going to be talking about who Mike Best beat two weeks ago."

She walks toward the door.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "They're going to be talking about the woman who beat Mike Best in Madison Square Garden."

Amy gives the slightest approving nod.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Sol Azteca."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Mikey Unlikely."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Kirsty McKinney."

Marie pauses at the doorway.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "And me."

She smiles.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "The final four."

Marie opens the door.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Then two more."

She looks back at Amy and Valkyrie.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "And then they can crown their Ring Queen."

Marie steps into the hallway.

Valkyrie follows immediately.

Amy remains behind for half a second.

She looks toward the two empty places in the locker room.

The bench where Trey had been sitting earlier.

The wall where Clovis had been standing.

Then Amy smiles.

Not broadly.

Just enough.

She follows Marie and Valkyrie into the hallway.

The camera moves with them.

Marie in front.

Valkyrie a step behind.

Amy beside her.

Three members of The Empire heading toward gorilla.

Not five.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Earlier tonight, Marie Van Claudio questioned whether Trey Mack was pulling his weight in The Empire."

MARK BRAVO: "And Clovis Black made it very clear whose side he was standing on when he stayed behind with Trey."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "For weeks, Trey Mack has been the one insisting The Empire wouldn't fall apart over one bad night. He's been the one trying to keep Marie and Amy from tearing it apart from the inside."

MARK BRAVO: "And for the biggest match of Marie's Ring King run, Trey Mack isn't here."

Marie continues toward gorilla.

No looking back now.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Neither is Clovis Black."

Marie reaches the curtain.

Amy and Valkyrie stop behind her.

Marie rolls her shoulders.

Takes one deep breath.

MARK BRAVO: "Whatever's happening inside The Empire will have to wait."

A stagehand raises five fingers.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Because the final spot in the Ring King Final Four is about to be decided."

Four.

Three.

Marie closes her eyes.

Two.

They open.

Focused.

One.

Marie Van Claudio steps through the curtain.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Marie Van Claudio."

MARK BRAVO: "Mike Best."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "First time ever."

MARK BRAVO: "And it's next."

Marie Van Claudio vs. Mike Best

Match

We return live to Madison Square Garden.

For several seconds...

Nothing happens.

The camera simply takes it in.

Eighteen thousand-plus fans surrounding the ring.

The lights sweeping through the upper levels of the world's most famous arena.

Signs held high.

Phones raised.

Everyone standing.

Everyone knowing exactly what comes next.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "We've reached our main event."

The roar grows.

MARK BRAVO: "And after weeks of qualifying matches, first-round matches, second-round matches, upsets, interference, shattered expectations and careers changing by the night..."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "...there is one place left."

The tournament bracket fills the video wall.

SOL AZTECA — ADVANCED

MIKEY UNLIKELY — ADVANCED

KIRSTY MCKINNEY — ADVANCED

??? — TONIGHT

The final empty position pulses gold.

MARK BRAVO: "Sol Azteca."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Mikey Unlikely."

MARK BRAVO: "Kirsty McKinney."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And in a matter of moments, either Marie Van Claudio or Mike Best joins them."

The camera moves toward the ring.

The ring announcer stands beneath the spotlight.

RING ANNOUNCER: "Ladies and gentlemen..."

The Garden begins getting louder.

RING ANNOUNCER: "...the following contest is your MAIN EVENT of the evening!"

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAR!

RING ANNOUNCER: "It is a SECOND ROUND MATCH in the 2026 RING KING TOURNAMENT!"

The Ring King logo consumes the video wall.

The crown.

The throne.

Los Angeles.

September 26.

RING ANNOUNCER: "The winner advances to the FINAL FOUR..."

A pause.

RING ANNOUNCER: "...at RING KING!"

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAR!

The lights go out.

Completely.

The crowd immediately reacts.

Then...

A single white light begins pulsing across the stage.

Once.

Twice.

Again.

The opening of "Forever and Ever" begins to fill Madison Square Garden.

Soft at first.

Almost delicate.

Then the violin enters.

And the entire stage erupts in brilliant white and gold.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO steps through the curtain.

The Garden explodes.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "The First Lady of the UTA!"

Marie stops beneath the lights.

Competition jacket over her ring gear.

Head held high.

Eyes fixed directly on the ring.

She doesn't smile immediately.

Not tonight.

For weeks, Marie Van Claudio has been saying the same thing.

She isn't trying to become the Ring King.

She's trying to become...

THE RING QUEEN.

The phrase appears across the video wall behind her in enormous gold lettering.

RING QUEEN.

Marie finally smiles.

There it is.

Confidence.

Expectation.

Entitlement.

Belief.

All wrapped together.

MARK BRAVO: "John, this started as a line."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Not anymore."

MARK BRAVO: "No. Not anymore. Marie Van Claudio is one victory away from being part of the final four."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And two victories after that from making good on every word she's said."

Marie takes several steps forward.

Then stops.

She turns her head slightly.

AMY HARRISON emerges from behind the curtain.

Boos immediately mix into the reaction.

The Empress walks out slowly.

A knowing smirk across her face.

She takes her place several feet behind Marie.

Then...

VALKYRIE KNOX steps through the curtain.

The Iron Valkyrie.

Tall.

Stoic.

Imposing.

She doesn't smile.

Doesn't acknowledge the crowd.

She simply positions herself behind Marie's opposite shoulder.

Marie in front.

Amy and Valkyrie behind her.

Three members of The Empire.

And the camera makes sure the audience notices the other two aren't there.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "The Empire accompanies Marie Van Claudio..."

MARK BRAVO: "Part of The Empire."

Marie hears the reaction.

She glances briefly behind herself.

Only Amy.

Only Valkyrie.

No Trey Mack.

No Clovis Black.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Trey Mack and Clovis Black are conspicuous by their absence."

MARK BRAVO: "After what happened earlier tonight, I'm not surprised."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Marie told Trey he wasn't welcome at ringside."

MARK BRAVO: "She didn't say that to Clovis."

The camera catches Marie staring toward the curtain for perhaps half a second longer than she should.

Amy catches it too.

Of course she does.

Amy leans slightly toward Marie.

Says something the microphone cannot pick up.

Marie immediately turns forward.

Whatever Amy said...

Marie isn't giving it another reaction.

Not now.

She starts toward the ring.

Amy and Valkyrie follow.

RING ANNOUNCER: "Introducing first..."

Marie walks beneath the enormous video wall displaying highlights from her UTA career.

2014.

The young Marie Van Claudio fighting to establish herself.

2015.

The First Lady.

Her challenge for the UTA Championship.

2016.

Women's Champion.

Then years disappear in seconds.

Until...

2025.

The return.

Valkyrie Knox.

Amy Harrison.

War.

The Women's Championship.

The Empire.

And now...

Ring King.

RING ANNOUNCER: "Accompanied to the ring by AMY HARRISON and VALKYRIE KNOX..."

Amy raises one arm arrogantly.

Valkyrie doesn't react.

RING ANNOUNCER: "From Montreal, Quebec, Canada..."

Marie slows midway down the aisle.

RING ANNOUNCER: "She is THE FIRST LADY..."

The crowd rises another level.

RING ANNOUNCER: "...OF THE UNITED TOUGHNESS ALLIANCE..."

Marie looks around Madison Square Garden.

Actually takes it in now.

RING ANNOUNCER: "MARIE..."

Marie raises both arms.

RING ANNOUNCER: "VAN..."

The gold lights sweep across the building.

RING ANNOUNCER: "CLAUDIOOOOOOOOOO!"

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAR!

Marie closes her eyes.

Just briefly.

This is what she came back for.

Not nostalgia.

Not an anniversary appearance.

Not to be introduced as someone important ten years ago.

This.

A main event.

Madison Square Garden.

One match away from the Ring King Final Four.

And Mike Best waiting on the other side.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Marie Van Claudio's relationship with the United Toughness Alliance goes back more than a decade."

MARK BRAVO: "But none of that history gets her into the semifinals."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "No."

MARK BRAVO: "She has to beat Mike Best."

Marie reaches ringside.

She stops.

Looks up toward the Ring King logo hanging above the ring.

Then toward the enormous crown displayed across the video wall.

Marie whispers something to herself.

The camera zooms closer.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Mine."

Amy smiles behind her.

Valkyrie remains stone-faced.

Marie climbs the steps.

Stops on the apron.

The ropes are opened for her.

She steps through.

Then immediately walks to the center of the ring.

No wasted movement.

No playing to every side of the building.

She simply stands beneath the spotlight.

Amy and Valkyrie take their positions at ringside.

Marie slowly raises one hand.

Not pointing upward.

Not acknowledging the crowd.

She places it above her own head.

Fingers curled.

As though setting an invisible crown upon herself.

RING QUEEN.

The crowd reacts loudly.

MARK BRAVO: "She can see it."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "She's been able to see it since this tournament began."

MARK BRAVO: "Tonight she has to reach out and take it."

Marie walks toward her corner.

She removes the entrance jacket.

Hands it through the ropes to Amy.

Amy takes it.

Marie says something quietly.

Amy nods.

Valkyrie steps closer.

Marie looks down at both women.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "All the way."

Amy looks up.

AMY HARRISON: "Empire."

Valkyrie gives a single nod.

Marie turns away.

Then looks toward the entrance.

Her expression hardens.

The smile is gone.

Because everything about the entrance was about Marie Van Claudio's dream.

Everything coming next...

is about the man standing between her and it.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Marie Van Claudio is ready."

MARK BRAVO: "Now comes the problem."

The camera pushes slowly toward Marie's face.

MARK BRAVO: "Mike Best."

Marie never takes her eyes off the entrance.

Fade into the opposing corner camera.

The camera remains fixed on Marie Van Claudio.

She stands in her corner.

Amy Harrison and Valkyrie Knox at ringside.

The lights around Madison Square Garden begin to dim.

Marie never looks away from the entrance.

The crowd begins to rise again.

Then—

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

The reaction is immediate.

Recognition spreads through Madison Square Garden in waves.

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

Marie shifts her weight slightly.

Amy looks toward the stage.

Valkyrie remains motionless.

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

The beat begins to build.

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

"WOO!"

? "PANDEMONIUM" — NF ?

Madison Square Garden erupts.

MIKE BEST steps onto the stage.

Alone.

No entourage.

No faction.

No one standing behind him.

No need.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "The Son of GOD."

MARK BRAVO: "UTA Hall of Famer."

Mike stops at the top of the ramp.

Hands loose at his sides.

He looks toward the ring.

At Marie.

At Amy.

At Valkyrie.

Then back at Marie.

No reaction.

No intimidation.

No surprise.

If anything...

Mike looks bored.

MARK BRAVO: "Look at him."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Marie Van Claudio entered with The Empire."

MARK BRAVO: "Mike Best looks like he's entering a doctor's appointment."

Mike slowly begins walking.

Not rushing.

Not soaking in the moment.

Just walking.

Like the ring was always the destination.

Like everything between him and it is wasted space.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "This is the first time Mike Best and Marie Van Claudio have ever met one-on-one."

MARK BRAVO: "And I promise you, Mike Best does not care."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "About the history?"

MARK BRAVO: "Any of it."

Mike reaches the middle of the ramp.

Stops.

The camera moves closer.

Mike raises his right hand.

Middle finger extended directly toward the lens.

And displayed prominently on that same hand...

the UTA Hall of Fame ring.

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAR!

MARK BRAVO: "There it is."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Subtle as ever."

MARK BRAVO: "That's Mike Best."

Mike lowers the hand.

Continues walking.

RING ANNOUNCER: "And her opponent..."

Mike never acknowledges the introduction.

RING ANNOUNCER: "From Chicago, Illinois..."

Mike reaches ringside.

Marie steps away from the corner slightly.

Amy immediately starts saying something to Mike from the floor.

Mike turns his head.

Looks directly at her.

Amy continues.

Mike stares for another second.

Then turns away.

Completely dismissing her.

Amy's expression changes immediately.

MARK BRAVO: "Oh, Amy didn't like that."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Mike Best didn't even respond."

MARK BRAVO: "Because to him, she's not the match."

Valkyrie steps slightly closer as Mike passes.

Mike looks at her.

There is recognition there.

He has been through Valkyrie before.

He knows what she is capable of.

Mike gives her the smallest nod.

Then keeps walking.

No fear.

No challenge.

No interest.

RING ANNOUNCER: "He is a member of the UNITED TOUGHNESS ALLIANCE HALL OF FAME..."

Mike grabs the bottom rope.

Drops flat.

Rolls smoothly underneath.

He rises immediately.

Marie is waiting.

For the first time tonight...

Mike and Marie Van Claudio stand inside the same ring.

Face-to-face.

RING ANNOUNCER: "THE SON OF GOD..."

The reaction swells.

RING ANNOUNCER: "MIKE..."

Mike's eyes remain on Marie.

RING ANNOUNCER: "BEEEEEEEEEST!"

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAR!

Mike doesn't raise his arms.

Doesn't pose.

Doesn't acknowledge the crowd.

He simply stands there.

Looking at Marie Van Claudio.

Marie stares back.

Neither moves.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "There is a major size difference here."

MARK BRAVO: "Mike Best: six-foot-one, two hundred thirty-five pounds."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Marie Van Claudio: five-foot-eight, one hundred thirty-five."

MARK BRAVO: "One hundred pounds."

Mike slowly looks Marie up...

Then down.

And that's when Marie realizes exactly what he's doing.

Mike is evaluating her.

Not admiring her.

Not disrespecting her because she is a woman.

Not even thinking about it.

He's looking at an opponent.

And he is unimpressed.

Marie sees it.

Her expression hardens.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Got something to say?"

Mike's mouth curls slightly.

Not quite a smile.

MIKE BEST: "Nope."

Marie steps closer.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Nothing?"

MIKE BEST: "What do you want me to say?"

Marie gestures toward herself.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "You know who I am."

MIKE BEST: "Yeah."

Mike shrugs.

MIKE BEST: "You're the person I have to beat."

The crowd reacts.

Marie's eyes narrow.

MIKE BEST: "That's it."

Amy begins shouting from ringside.

AMY HARRISON: "Show some respect!"

Mike looks toward her.

Then toward Valkyrie.

Then around the arena.

Finally back to Marie.

MIKE BEST: "For what?"

Marie steps even closer.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Everything I've done here."

MIKE BEST: "Don't care."

A louder reaction.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "The Empire."

MIKE BEST: "Don't care."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "I'm going to become the Ring Queen."

Mike pauses.

Looks at her.

MIKE BEST: "Then beat me."

The Garden explodes.

Marie doesn't respond.

Mike takes one step backward.

Then another.

He removes his entrance shirt.

Tosses it through the ropes.

Rolls his neck once.

Then settles into his corner.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "That's it."

MARK BRAVO: "That's Mike Best's entire opinion of Marie Van Claudio."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Not that she can't beat him."

MARK BRAVO: "No."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Not that she shouldn't be here."

MARK BRAVO: "No."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Just..."

MARK BRAVO: "Prove it."

Marie paces in her corner.

Furious.

Amy leans through the ropes.

AMY HARRISON: "Make him regret that."

Valkyrie stands beside her.

Eyes fixed on Mike.

Mike sees both women.

Looks at them.

Then at Marie.

He motions toward them with one hand.

MIKE BEST: "You need them?"

Marie's head snaps up.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "I don't need anybody."

Mike nods once.

MIKE BEST: "Good."

He lowers into a fighting stance.

MIKE BEST: "Then send them home."

Amy starts shouting again.

Marie ignores her.

She walks toward the center of the ring.

Mike meets her there.

The referee steps between them.

Looks toward Marie.

Looks toward Mike.

Both nod.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Mike Best does not care that Marie Van Claudio is a woman."

MARK BRAVO: "He doesn't care that she's The First Lady."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "He doesn't care about The Empire."

MARK BRAVO: "He doesn't care about Ring Queen."

Mike and Marie stand inches apart.

MARK BRAVO: "Mike Best cares about one thing."

The referee raises one hand.

MARK BRAVO: "Winning."

Marie looks up at Mike.

Mike looks down at Marie.

The referee checks both competitors one final time.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "One place remains."

Madison Square Garden rises.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Marie Van Claudio."

MARK BRAVO: "Mike Best."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "First time ever."

MARK BRAVO: "Final Four on the line."

The referee signals.

DING!

DING!

DING!

Neither moves.

Not yet.

The main event has begun.

DING! DING! DING!

Neither moves.

Mike Best stands near the center of the ring.

Marie Van Claudio stands several feet away.

The noise inside Madison Square Garden hangs over them.

Mike raises both hands.

Loose.

Ready.

Marie circles.

Mike doesn't.

He simply turns with her.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And look at Mike Best."

MARK BRAVO: "He's not chasing her."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "He's making Marie come to him."

Marie steps forward.

Mike immediately reaches for a collar-and-elbow tie-up.

Marie ducks underneath.

Waistlock.

Mike plants his feet.

Marie tries to pull him backward.

Nothing.

Mike looks down at her hands around his waist.

Then slowly looks over his shoulder.

The slightest smirk.

He reaches down.

Breaks the grip.

Turns.

Snatches a standing headlock.

Tight.

Immediate.

Marie tries to push him toward the ropes.

Mike drops his weight.

Stops her.

Then grinds the side of his forearm against her jaw.

MARK BRAVO: "This is exactly where Mike Best wants this."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Close quarters."

MARK BRAVO: "Weight on top of her. Make Marie carry him. Make her work for everything."

Marie drives a forearm into Mike's ribs.

Once.

Twice.

A third time.

Mike releases.

Marie hits the ropes.

Mike turns—

SMACK!

Shoulder block.

Marie hits the canvas.

Mike stops.

Looks down.

Marie immediately rolls to one knee.

Mike gives her the same expression he gave during the entrance.

Unimpressed.

MIKE BEST: "That it?"

Marie hears it.

So does Madison Square Garden.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Mike Best is trying to get into her head early."

MARK BRAVO: "No, John."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "No?"

MARK BRAVO: "I think he actually means it."

Marie stands.

No smile now.

She hits the ropes again.

Mike braces.

Marie comes back—

And instead of colliding...

she slides underneath his arm.

Spins.

SLAP!

Open hand across Mike Best's face.

The Garden erupts.

Mike freezes.

Marie backs away.

Eyes locked on his.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "No."

A beat.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "That's not it."

The crowd pops.

Mike slowly turns his head back toward her.

His cheek is already reddening.

And for the first time...

the smirk is gone.

MARK BRAVO: "Okay."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Mike Best noticed that."

Mike advances.

Faster now.

Marie meets him.

Forearm from Mike.

Marie staggers.

Another forearm.

Marie answers with one of her own.

Mike responds immediately.

Marie fires back.

Mike.

Marie.

Mike.

Marie.

The speed increases.

Marie ducks the next shot.

SNAP DDT!

Mike Best is planted.

Marie rolls him over.

ONE!

Mike throws a shoulder up.

One.

Not two.

Marie doesn't argue.

She immediately grabs the arm.

Tries to pull Mike up.

Mike yanks her forward instead.

Belly-to-belly suplex!

THUD!

Marie lands hard.

Mike rolls through.

Hooks her around the waist.

Hauls her up.

GERMAN SUPLEX!

Marie folds over her shoulders.

Mike doesn't release.

He pulls her up again.

Marie throws an elbow backward.

Mike absorbs it.

Another.

Another.

Mike finally releases.

Marie turns—

RUNNING SNAP DROPKICK!

Mike Best catches her square in the chest.

Marie flies backward into the corner.

Mike charges.

Mounted punches.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

FOUR!

The referee warns him.

Mike drops down before the count becomes an issue.

Then drives a knee into Marie's midsection.

Marie folds.

Mike hooks her.

SNAP SUPLEX!

Marie crashes near the center of the ring.

Mike floats over.

ONE!

TWO!

Marie kicks out.

Mike doesn't react.

No frustration.

No surprise.

He simply grabs Marie by the wrist and starts pulling her back to her feet.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Mike Best is approaching this like a veteran dismantling a problem."

MARK BRAVO: "Because that's exactly what he thinks she is."

Mike twists the arm.

Wrist control.

Marie drops to one knee.

Mike transitions.

Hammerlock.

Then a rear waistlock.

Marie fights the hands.

Mike switches.

Trips her.

Immediately dives on top.

Front facelock.

Marie tries to stand.

Mike sprawls.

Forces her back down.

Ground control.

No wasted motion.

Mike starts threading an arm underneath.

Marie recognizes the danger.

She drives forward.

Gets a knee underneath herself.

Mike transitions again.

Armbar attempt—

Marie rolls through!

Mike follows—

Marie catches him!

SMALL PACKAGE!

ONE!

TWO!

Mike kicks out!

Both scramble up.

Mike swings.

Marie ducks.

SPINNING HEEL KICK!

Mike gets caught across the jaw.

He staggers backward.

Marie sees it.

Hits the ropes.

CLOTHESLINE!

Mike doesn't go down.

Marie rebounds.

SECOND CLOTHESLINE!

Mike stumbles.

Still standing.

Marie hits the ropes again.

Mike loads up a lariat—

Marie ducks beneath.

Leaps.

FACEBUSTER!

Mike Best hits the mat.

The Garden erupts.

Marie hooks both legs.

ONE!

TWO!

Mike kicks out!

Two.

This time, definitely two.

Marie sits up.

Breathing harder.

Mike rolls toward the ropes.

Amy pounds the apron.

AMY HARRISON: "THAT'S IT! STAY ON HIM!"

Valkyrie says nothing.

She watches Mike carefully.

Marie gets up.

Mike is on one knee.

Marie comes in—

Mike catches the leg!

Marie hops on one foot.

Enzuigiri!

Mike releases and stumbles into the ropes.

Marie charges.

Mike bends down.

Back body drop attempt—

Marie lands on the apron!

Mike turns.

SLAP!

Marie catches him again.

Mike takes two steps backward.

Marie slingshots herself through the ropes—

CROSSBODY!

Mike catches her.

The entire crowd rises.

Marie realizes the mistake immediately.

MARK BRAVO: "Oh no."

Mike adjusts his grip.

Marie starts throwing elbows.

Mike absorbs one.

Two.

Three.

Marie slips free behind him.
Pushes him toward the ropes.
Mike rebounds.
Marie catches him—
GERMAN SUPLEX!
Mike Best goes over!
The Garden erupts again.
JOHN PHILLIPS: "Marie got him!"
MARK BRAVO: "She got all of it!"
Mike rolls onto his stomach.
Marie gets to her feet.
She looks toward Amy.
Amy is shouting.
Valkyrie is staring.
Marie turns back.
Mike is already getting up.
Slowly.
But he's getting up.
Marie looks almost offended.
Mike reaches his feet.
He rolls one shoulder.
Touches the back of his neck.
Then looks directly at Marie.
The expression is different now.
Not anger.
Not fear.
Recognition.
Mike nods.
Once.
JOHN PHILLIPS: "There."
MARK BRAVO: "Yep."
JOHN PHILLIPS: "That's what Marie wanted."
MARK BRAVO: "Mike Best finally believes he's in a fight."

Marie sees the nod.

And smiles.

Not arrogantly.

Not this time.

Because she earned that one.

Mike raises both hands again.

This time tighter.

More serious.

Marie lowers into her stance.

The two begin circling again.

Only now...

Mike Best is circling too.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "The first five minutes belonged to Mike Best's assumptions."

MARK BRAVO: "The rest of this match might be about Marie Van Claudio proving every damn one of them wrong."

They close distance again.

Mike shoots low.

Marie sprawls.

Mike switches around.

Marie rolls.

Mike catches the arm.

Marie counters.

Both scramble back to their feet.

They stop.

Face-to-face again.

And this time...

neither looks unimpressed.

Mike Best and Marie Van Claudio circle again.

Different now.

The casual arrogance is gone from Mike's posture.

Marie notices.

So does Madison Square Garden.

They close.

Mike reaches for the head.

Marie knocks the hands away.

Low kick to the thigh!

THWACK!

Mike backs off.

Marie immediately kicks the same leg again.

THWACK!

Mike catches the third attempt.

Marie balances on one foot.

Mike pulls her toward him—

Marie jumps!

ENZUIGIRI!

Mike releases.

Marie lands.

Mike staggers sideways.

Marie immediately sweeps the leg!

Mike goes down to one knee.

Marie hits the ropes.

RUNNING KNEE!

Mike Best is knocked backward!

Marie covers!

ONE!

TWO!

Mike kicks out!

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Marie has changed her approach."

MARK BRAVO: "She had to. She's not going to win a strength contest with Mike Best, so she's taking away the strength underneath him."

Marie grabs Mike's leg.

Mike immediately recognizes where this is going.

He twists.

Kicks Marie away with the free leg.

Marie rolls backward.

Mike rises—

Marie charges again!

Mike sidesteps.

Marie hits the ropes chest-first.

Mike grabs her from behind.

GERMAN SUPLEX!

Marie lands hard!

Mike holds on.

He gets back up.

Marie desperately hooks one leg around his.

Mike tries to lift.

Marie blocks.

Mike tries again.

Marie throws an elbow backward.

Mike ducks it.

Changes his grip.

HALF-NELSON SUPLEX!

Marie crashes down!

Mike covers.

ONE!

TWO!

Marie gets the shoulder up!

Mike remains kneeling beside her.

He looks down at Marie.

Then at her right arm.

Decision made.

Mike grabs the wrist.

Pulls Marie onto her stomach.

Plants a knee between her shoulder blades.

And wrenches the arm backward.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Now Mike Best is changing his approach."

MARK BRAVO: "That's what makes him dangerous."

Marie reaches toward the ropes.

Too far.

Mike twists the wrist.

Then pulls the arm farther behind her.

Marie grimaces.

Amy starts pounding the apron.

AMY HARRISON: "GET UP, MARIE!"

Valkyrie watches silently.

Marie pushes herself onto one knee.

Mike keeps the arm.

Marie gets another foot underneath herself.

Mike suddenly yanks her backward.

SHORT-ARM CLOTHESLINE!

Marie flips inside out!

Mike still has the wrist.

MARK BRAVO: "He never let go."

Mike drags Marie back up by the same arm.

Hammerlock.

Then drives her shoulder-first into the turnbuckles!

THUD!

Marie recoils.

Mike pulls her back.

Shoulder-first again!

THUD!

Marie drops to her knees.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Mike Best has found something."

MARK BRAVO: "And now he's going to keep touching it until it breaks."

Mike grabs Marie's arm.

Wraps it across the middle rope.

Pulls.

The referee immediately starts counting.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

FOUR!

Mike releases.

Immediately.

Not because he cares about Marie's arm.

Because he knows exactly how long he has.

Marie pulls the arm into her chest.

Mike looks down at her.

MIKE BEST: "Still wanna be Queen?"

Marie looks up.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Fuck you."

Mike nods.

MIKE BEST: "Good."

He pulls her up.

Marie suddenly drives her forehead into Mike's face!

CRACK!

Mike staggers backward.

Marie grabs her shoulder.

Then charges.

FOREARM!

Mike stumbles into the corner.

Marie follows.

FOREARM!

FOREARM!

FOREARM!

Mike covers up.

Marie switches levels.

KICK TO THE KNEE!

Mike buckles.

ANOTHER!

Mike drops to one knee.

Marie backs away.

Runs forward—

SHINING WIZARD!

Mike Best goes down!

Marie falls on top!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

Mike kicks out!

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAR!

Marie rolls away.

She looks toward the referee.

Two.

Definitely two.

Amy is screaming from ringside.

AMY HARRISON: "YOU'VE GOT HIM!"

Valkyrie slaps the apron once.

Hard.

VALKYRIE KNOX: "Again."

Marie nods.

She grabs Mike's legs.

Mike immediately starts fighting.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Marie wants the Sharpshooter!"

Marie steps through!

Mike twists!

Marie tries to turn him!

Mike grabs her bad arm!

Marie screams.

Her grip breaks.

Mike rolls through.

Marie goes forward.

Both scramble up.

Mike kicks the damaged arm!

Marie recoils.

DDT!

Mike spikes her!

Cover!

ONE!

TWO!

Marie kicks out!

Mike immediately grabs the arm again.

Marie knows what's coming.

She scrambles toward the ropes.

Mike drags her backward.

Marie kicks wildly.

Mike tries to isolate the arm.

Marie rolls.

Stacks Mike!

ONE!

TWO!

Mike escapes!

Both rise.

SUPERKICK!

Marie catches Mike flush!

Mike falls into the ropes.

They propel him back toward her.

Marie hooks him!

Mike blocks.

Marie tries again.

Mike drives an elbow into the damaged shoulder.

Marie releases.

Mike spins—

DISCUSS LARIAT!

Marie ducks!

Mike turns—

SUPERKICK TO THE KNEE!

Mike drops!

Marie grabs him!

Hooks the head!

TORNADO DDT!

Mike Best is planted again!

Marie crawls into the cover!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

Mike gets the shoulder up!

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAR!

Marie slaps the mat.

Once.

Frustration beginning to creep in.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Marie Van Claudio is getting closer."

MARK BRAVO: "But that's where Mike Best becomes dangerous. Close doesn't mean anything to him."

Marie gets up.

She shakes the damaged arm.

Tries to restore feeling.

Mike is pulling himself up using the ropes.

His right leg is slower now.

Marie sees it.

Mike sees her see it.

They stare at one another.

And both understand.

Mike has Marie's arm.

Marie has Mike's leg.

Now they're going to find out which one matters more.

Marie charges.

Mike sidesteps.

Marie stops herself at the ropes.

Mike comes from behind—

Marie catches the boot!

Dragon screw!

Mike hits the canvas!

Marie keeps the leg!

She steps through!

JOHN PHILLIPS: "AGAIN!"

Mike reaches for her arm.

Marie jerks it away!

She turns!

SHARPSHOOTER!

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAR!

Marie sits down!

Mike Best's body arches!

JOHN PHILLIPS: "SHE'S GOT IT!"

MARK BRAVO: "CENTER OF THE RING!"

Mike reaches forward.

The ropes are nowhere near him.

Marie pulls harder.

Her damaged arm trembles.

But she holds.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "TAP!"

Mike shakes his head.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "TAP!"

Mike digs his forearms into the canvas.

Starts dragging himself forward.

Marie pulls him backward.

Mike screams through clenched teeth.

He reaches again.

Still short.

Marie sits deeper.

Mike's hand rises.

The crowd rises with it.

His hand hovers above the canvas.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "MIKE BEST MAY HAVE TO TAP!"

Amy Harrison is losing her mind at ringside.

AMY HARRISON: "DO IT! DO IT!"

Valkyrie steps closer to the apron.

Even she looks convinced.

Mike's hand starts coming down—

But stops.

He plants it.

Pushes.

Marie shakes her head.

Pulls harder.

Mike pushes again.

One inch.

Then another.

Marie tries dragging him back.

Her right arm gives.

Just for a second.

That's enough.

Mike surges forward!

Fingertips touch the bottom rope!

JOHN PHILLIPS: "HE GOT IT!"

Marie keeps the hold.

The referee begins counting.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

Marie finally releases.

Mike immediately rolls underneath the bottom rope.

He drops to the floor.

Marie remains kneeling in the ring.

Holding her arm.

Breathing heavily.

Mike sits against the barricade.

Holding his knee.

Breathing just as hard.

For the first time all night...

Mike Best looks across at Marie Van Claudio without even a trace of dismissal.

MARK BRAVO: "That was close."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Closer than Mike Best wanted it to be."

Marie pulls herself up using the ropes.

Mike begins standing outside.

He tests the leg.

It holds.

Barely.

Marie points at him.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "I almost had you."

Mike looks up.

Nods.

MIKE BEST: "Almost."

Marie doesn't like that word.

Not after tonight.

Not after everything she said about Trey Mack earlier.

Nearly doesn't matter.

Almost doesn't matter.

Only winning matters.

Marie steps through the ropes.

Onto the apron.

Mike sees her.

Marie runs along the apron—

DIVING METEORA!

Mike moves!

Marie crashes hard onto the floor!

THUD!

Madison Square Garden gasps.

Marie curls around the damaged shoulder.

Mike stands over her.

He looks down.

Then toward Amy.

Then Valkyrie.

Amy takes a step forward.

Valkyrie does too.

Mike sees both.

He doesn't back away.

Instead...

Mike spreads his arms.

MIKE BEST: "Come on."

Amy stops.

Valkyrie's eyes narrow.

MIKE BEST: "I know you're gonna."

Mike points toward Marie.

MIKE BEST: "So fucking do it."

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAR!

Amy starts forward.

Valkyrie reaches out.

Stops her.

Amy turns toward Valkyrie.

Valkyrie shakes her head once.

VALKYRIE KNOX: "Not yet."

Mike laughs.

MIKE BEST: "Thought so."

Mike grabs Marie.

Pulls her up.

And rolls her underneath the bottom rope.

Mike follows.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Mike Best knows exactly what is standing outside that ring."

MARK BRAVO: "And he just invited The Empire to take their shot."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "They didn't."

MARK BRAVO: "Yet."

Mike enters.

Marie is struggling toward her knees.

Mike walks toward her.

Grabs the damaged arm.

Marie immediately panics.

She throws a desperate kick at the injured knee!

Mike buckles!

Marie rolls him up!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

MIKE ESCAPES!

Both scramble up!

Marie swings!

Mike catches the arm!

Pulls her in!

KNEE TO THE FACE!

Marie collapses!

Mike drops beside her.

But he doesn't cover.

His knee won't let him.

He grabs it.

Marie lies beside him.

Both competitors down.

Amy stares through the ropes.

Valkyrie watches.

The referee begins checking both.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Neither one can take control!"

MARK BRAVO: "And now we're getting into dangerous territory."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "For who?"

Bravo pauses.

MARK BRAVO: "Everybody."

The camera pulls back.

Mike Best down.

Marie Van Claudio down.

Amy Harrison pacing.

Valkyrie Knox watching.

And high above them...

the Ring King crown remains on the video wall.

One place left.

And neither competitor willing to give it up.

Both competitors remain down.

Mike Best on his side.

One hand wrapped around his knee.

Marie Van Claudio on her back.

Her damaged arm pulled tight against her chest.

The referee checks Mike.

Then Marie.

Neither wants the match stopped.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "This has become exactly the kind of fight neither one of them wanted."

MARK BRAVO: "No. This is exactly the kind of fight Mike Best always expects."

Mike rolls toward the ropes.

Uses them to pull himself upright.

Marie starts crawling toward the opposite side.

Amy Harrison is there.

Immediately.

AMY HARRISON: "COME ON!"

Marie reaches for the middle rope.

Amy reaches through.

Grabs Marie's wrist.

Helps her pull herself up.

The referee turns.

Amy immediately releases.

Hands up.

Innocent.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Amy Harrison just gave Marie a little assistance."

MARK BRAVO: "A little?"

Mike sees it.

Of course he does.

He laughs.

Not loudly.

Just enough for Marie to hear.

MIKE BEST: "There it is."

Marie turns.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Shut up."

Mike pushes himself away from the ropes.

MIKE BEST: "Took longer than I thought."

Marie charges.

Mike catches her!

SPINNING SPINEBUSTER!

Marie is planted!

Mike falls into the cover!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

Marie gets the shoulder up!

Mike sits up.

No frustration.

He looks toward Amy.

Points at her.

MIKE BEST: "Try harder."

Amy's eyes narrow.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Mike Best is baiting Amy Harrison now."

MARK BRAVO: "He's been baiting all of them since he walked out here."

Mike pulls Marie up.

Marie suddenly catches him with a jawbreaker!

Mike stumbles backward.

Marie follows with a spinning heel kick!

Mike falls into the corner.

Marie charges!

Mike moves!

Marie hits the turnbuckles hard.

Mike wraps her from behind.

Marie throws elbows.

Mike holds.

Attempts another German—

Marie hooks the ropes!

Mike pulls.

Marie refuses to let go.

The referee moves closer to check the grip.

And that is all Amy needs.

She moves around the corner of the ring.

Quick.

Low.

Mike finally breaks Marie away from the ropes.

He pulls her backward—

Amy reaches through.

Hooks Mike's ankle.

Just for a second.

Mike's bad leg buckles.

Marie drops behind him.

ROLL-UP!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

Mike escapes!

Mike scrambles to his knees.

Looks toward ringside.

Amy has already moved away.

Arms folded.

Smiling.

Mike starts laughing.

MIKE BEST: "Yeah."

He nods.

MIKE BEST: "There we go."

Marie hesitates.

Only slightly.

Mike sees it.

MIKE BEST: "What?"

Mike rises.

MIKE BEST: "You didn't know?"

Marie steps toward him.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Focus on me."

MIKE BEST: "I am."

Mike points toward Amy.

MIKE BEST: "That's part of you, right?"

Amy immediately starts shouting.

AMY HARRISON: "DON'T LISTEN TO HIM!"

Mike smirks.

MIKE BEST: "Thought so."

Marie fires a forearm.

Mike fires back.

Marie again.

Mike again.

Marie throws a third—

Mike catches the arm!

Twists!

Marie screams!

Mike pulls her forward—

RUNNING KNEE!

Marie gets blasted!

She drops to both knees.

Mike backs into the ropes.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "WAIT!"

MARK BRAVO: "HE'S LOOKING FOR IT!"

Mike measures Marie.

Seated.

Vulnerable.

Perfect position.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "I KNEED A HERO!"

Mike explodes forward—

VALKYRIE KNOX reaches through the ropes!

Grabs Marie by the waistband!

YANKS her backward!

Mike's shining wizard flies through empty space!

He lands awkwardly on the bad leg!

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAR!

Marie rolls underneath the bottom rope.

Valkyrie catches her.

Holds her upright.

The referee turns toward ringside.

Valkyrie immediately lets go.

Marie looks at her.

Then at Mike.

She knows exactly what almost happened.

MARK BRAVO: "That may have saved Marie Van Claudio's tournament!"

JOHN PHILLIPS: "If Mike connects with I KNEED A HERO, this thing is over."

Mike sits on the mat.

Clutching the knee.

Then slowly...

he starts laughing.

Again.

Marie looks toward him.

MIKE BEST: "There you are."

Valkyrie stares back.

Mike points at her.

MIKE BEST: "I was wondering when you'd show up."

Valkyrie's expression does not change.

VALKYRIE KNOX: "Fight."

Mike nods.

MIKE BEST: "I am."

He points toward all three women.

MIKE BEST: "Apparently."

The crowd reacts.

Marie climbs onto the apron.

Mike starts getting up.

Marie springboards—

MISSILE DROPKICK!

Mike is knocked backward!

Marie lands hard on the bad shoulder but pushes through!

She grabs Mike.

SNAP DDT!

Cover!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

MIKE KICKS OUT!

Marie sits up.

Breathing hard.

Amy pounds the mat.

AMY HARRISON: "COME ON! FINISH HIM!"

Marie turns toward Amy.

Amy points toward Mike.

Then toward Marie.

AMY HARRISON: "RING QUEEN!"

The crowd boos.

Marie looks toward the Ring King logo.

The crown.

Still there.

Still waiting.

She stands.

Mike rolls onto his knees.

Marie backs into the corner.

Waves him up.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "GET UP!"

Mike starts standing.

Marie runs!

POISONRANA!

Mike gets spiked!

He folds awkwardly!

Marie immediately grabs the legs!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

MIKE KICKS OUT!

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAR!

Marie falls backward.

Hands on her head.

She cannot believe it.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Marie Van Claudio is throwing everything at him!"

MARK BRAVO: "And Mike Best is still here!"

Marie pushes herself upright.

Mike is barely moving.

Amy sees it.

Valkyrie sees it.

And for the first time...

The two women exchange a look.

Not celebration.

Concern.

Because Mike Best is still here.

And if he gets one clean opening...

this ends.

Amy walks around the ring.

The referee notices.

REFEREE: "Back up!"

Amy raises her hands.

AMY HARRISON: "I'm not doing anything!"

Valkyrie moves in the opposite direction.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Watch Valkyrie."

Marie pulls Mike toward the ropes.

Mike suddenly catches her!

Inside cradle!

ONE!

TWO!

Marie escapes!

Both rise.

Mike swings—

Marie ducks!

Mike hits the ropes.

Valkyrie reaches through—

Mike stops himself!

Turns!

Looks straight down at her!

Valkyrie's hand freezes.

Mike smiles.

MIKE BEST: "Gotcha."

Valkyrie doesn't blink.

Marie charges from behind!

Mike moves!

Marie nearly collides with Valkyrie!

She stops herself against the ropes!

Valkyrie jumps backward.

Mike grabs Marie!

NORTHERN LIGHTS SUPLEX!

Bridge!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

MARIE ESCAPES!

Mike releases.

Both remain down.

Amy looks increasingly desperate.

AMY HARRISON: "GET UP!"

Marie rolls toward her.

Mike rolls toward the opposite side.

The referee checks both.

Then...

The crowd begins reacting.

Not to anything in the ring.

Something else.

A ripple begins near the entrance.

Then spreads.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Wait a minute."

Amy looks toward the stage.

Valkyrie does the same.

Marie is still down.

Mike looks toward the entrance from his knees.

The camera turns.

At the top of the ramp...

TREY MACK.

And beside him...

CLOVIS BLACK.

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAR!

Neither man moves.

Trey stands with his arms at his sides.

No grin.

No playful energy.

Clovis stands beside him.

Stone-faced.

Silent.

Watching.

MARK BRAVO: "Well, look who decided to show up."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Trey Mack and Clovis Black."

Marie reaches the ropes.

Pulls herself upright.

She looks toward the stage.

Sees them.

Her face changes.

Relief.

Just for an instant.

Amy smiles.

Valkyrie gives a slow nod.

AMY HARRISON: "There."

Marie keeps staring.

Trey and Clovis stare back.

Still not moving.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "After everything earlier tonight..."

MARK BRAVO: "They're here."

Marie slowly smiles.

She taps her chest.

Then points toward Amy.

Valkyrie.

Then toward Trey and Clovis.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Empire."

Trey says nothing.

Clovis says nothing.

Mike Best watches from across the ring.

Then he starts laughing.

Marie turns.

MIKE BEST: "Oh, this is fucking adorable."

Marie glares.

MIKE BEST: "You finally got the whole family together."

Mike pushes himself up.

MIKE BEST: "Now can we wrestle?"

Marie charges.

Mike meets her.

Forearm!

Marie answers!

Mike fires another!

Marie fires back!

They begin trading in the center of the ring.

While on the stage...

Trey Mack and Clovis Black continue to watch.

Neither cheering.

Neither leaving.

Not yet.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "What are Trey and Clovis going to do?"

MARK BRAVO: "I don't know."

Mike blasts Marie with another forearm.

Marie answers with a slap.

Mike smiles.

Then drives a knee into her ribs.

MARK BRAVO: "But sooner or later..."

Mike hooks Marie around the waist.

Marie fights the grip.

MARK BRAVO: "...they're going to have to pick a side."

Mike Best has Marie Van Claudio around the waist.

Marie fights the grip.

On the stage...

Trey Mack and Clovis Black remain motionless.

Watching.

Waiting.

Mike tries to lift.

Marie blocks.

Mike adjusts.

Marie throws an elbow backward.

Another.

A third.

Mike releases.

Marie turns.

SLAP!

Mike's head snaps sideways.

Marie follows with a spinning heel kick!

Mike falls into the ropes.

Marie backs away.

Runs.

CLOTHESLINE!

Mike tumbles through the ropes to the floor!

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAR!

Marie drops to one knee.

Breathing hard.

Her injured arm hangs slightly lower than the other.

Amy pounds the apron.

AMY HARRISON: "COME ON!"

Marie looks toward the stage.

Trey and Clovis are still there.

Neither man has moved.

Marie stares at them.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Well?"

Trey looks toward Clovis.

Clovis looks back.

No words.

Then Trey exhales.

And starts walking.

The crowd reacts immediately.

Clovis follows.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Here they come."

MARK BRAVO: "Trey Mack and Clovis Black are heading to ringside."

Marie sees them.

And for the first time since the opening bell...

she smiles.

A real smile.

Relief.

Amy notices.

Valkyrie watches the two men approach.

Mike is on the floor near the barricade.

He looks up the aisle.

Sees Trey.

Sees Clovis.

Then looks around at Amy and Valkyrie.

Four people.

One Mike Best.

Mike starts laughing.

MIKE BEST: "Of course."

Trey reaches ringside.

Amy immediately steps toward him.

For a second...

there is tension.

Trey looks at her.

Amy looks back.

Then Amy gives him a small nod.

Trey returns it.

Clovis takes position beside Valkyrie.

The two powerhouses stand side-by-side.

Silent.

Imposing.

Valkyrie gives Clovis the slightest glance.

Clovis gives one back.

Nothing more.

Inside the ring...

Marie stands.

Looks around.

Amy.

Valkyrie.

Trey.

Clovis.

All four.

The whole Empire.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "For all the tension earlier tonight..."

MARK BRAVO: "They're together."

Marie walks toward the ropes.

Points toward Trey.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "All the way."

Trey stares up at her.

Then nods.

TREY MACK: "Empire."

Marie turns toward Clovis.

Clovis gives one short nod.

Marie looks satisfied.

MARK BRAVO: "Well there it is."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Maybe the fracture has been repaired."

Mike hears that from the floor.

He looks toward commentary.

MIKE BEST: "Bullshit."

The crowd laughs.

Mike rolls back into the ring.

Marie immediately stomps him.

Once.

Twice.

Mike covers up.

Marie grabs him.

SNAP DDT!

Cover!

ONE!

TWO!

Mike kicks out!

Marie sits up.

Amy shouts encouragement.

Trey does not.

Clovis does not.

But both remain.

And right now...

that is enough for Marie.

She pulls Mike up.
Mike suddenly fires a body shot.
Marie folds.
Mike fires another.
Then an elbow.
Marie staggers.
HASHTAG MUTED!
Superkick!
Marie collapses!
Mike hooks the leg.
ONE!
TWO!
THR—
Marie kicks out!
ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAR!
Mike sits back.
Nods once.
Almost approving.
MIKE BEST: "Alright."
Marie rolls onto her side.
Mike grabs the arm.
Marie immediately starts fighting.
Mike tries to pull her into an armbar.
Marie clasps her hands together.
Mike pries at the grip.
Marie rolls.
Mike rolls with her.
Marie stacks him!
ONE!
TWO!
Mike rolls through!
Still holding the arm!
He transitions.

GILDED CAGE!

Mike Best locks in the chicken-wing Muta lock!

Marie screams!

JOHN PHILLIPS: "GILDED CAGE!"

MARK BRAVO: "That damaged shoulder!"

Mike cranks back.

Marie's body twists unnaturally.

She reaches with her free hand.

Ropes too far.

Amy starts shouting.

AMY HARRISON: "MARIE! COME ON!"

Valkyrie steps closer.

Trey watches.

Clovis watches.

Marie reaches again.

Nothing.

Mike pulls harder.

MIKE BEST: "QUIT."

Marie shakes her head.

MIKE BEST: "QUIT."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "NO!"

Marie claws at the canvas.

One inch.

Another.

Mike drags her backward.

The crowd reacts.

Marie screams again.

Amy looks toward Trey.

Trey looks at her.

Amy gestures subtly toward the ropes.

Trey does nothing.

Amy's expression tightens.

She looks toward Clovis.

Clovis doesn't move.

Amy turns back toward Marie.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Amy Harrison is looking for help."

MARK BRAVO: "Interesting."

Marie reaches again.

Still short.

Valkyrie moves.

She walks around the corner.

The referee sees her.

Points.

REFEREE: "BACK!"

Valkyrie stops.

The referee warns her.

Amy uses the distraction.

She reaches beneath the bottom rope.

Extends both hands toward Marie.

Marie sees them.

Stretches.

Fingertips almost touch—

Mike sees Amy.

He releases the hold.

Immediately.

Marie collapses.

Mike springs up.

Charges toward Amy!

Amy jerks backward!

BASEBALL SLIDE!

Mike shoots underneath the bottom rope!

Amy moves!

Mike lands on the floor!

Valkyrie charges!

Mike turns—

BIG BOOT!

Valkyrie catches Mike in the chest!
He crashes backward into the barricade!
BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!
JOHN PHILLIPS: "VALKYRIE!"
MARK BRAVO: "The referee didn't see it!"
Valkyrie immediately backs away.
Stone-faced.
Amy smiles.
Trey looks at Valkyrie.
Then at Mike.
Clovis does the same.
Neither man reacts.
Inside the ring...
Marie realizes what happened.
She crawls toward the ropes.
Looks out at Mike.
Then toward Valkyrie.
No objection.
No protest.
Marie simply rolls underneath the ropes.
Grabs Mike.
Pulls him up.
Rolls him back inside.
MARK BRAVO: "There it is."
JOHN PHILLIPS: "Marie knows."
MARK BRAVO: "And she doesn't care."
Marie climbs onto the apron.
Slowly.
Her right arm barely helping.
She climbs the turnbuckles.
Mike lies near the center.
Marie reaches the top.
Looks around Madison Square Garden.

Then at the Ring King crown.

She leaps.

MONTREAL SPINOUT!

DIVING SPINNING STUNNER!

IT CONNECTS!

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAR!

Mike Best crashes backward!

Marie collapses beside him!

Then throws herself across Mike's chest!

ONE!

TWO!

THREE—

NO!

MIKE BEST GETS THE SHOULDER UP!

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAR!

Marie freezes.

Her eyes go wide.

The referee holds up two fingers.

Marie looks at them.

Then at Mike.

Then back at the referee.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "NO!"

Two.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "THAT WAS THREE!"

The referee shakes their head.

Two.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Mike Best survived the Montreal Spinout!"

MARK BRAVO: "After the Sharpshooter! After the Poisonrana! After everything Marie has thrown at him!"

Marie sits beside Mike.

Staring.

She looks exhausted.

Her shoulder is wrecked.

Mike's leg is damaged.

Neither should still be going.

But they are.

Amy shouts from ringside.

AMY HARRISON: "AGAIN!"

Marie turns.

AMY HARRISON: "DO IT AGAIN!"

Marie nods.

She grabs Mike.

Pulls him toward the corner.

Mike barely resists.

Marie starts climbing again.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "She's going for another one."

MARK BRAVO: "Can that shoulder even survive another Montreal Spinout?"

Marie reaches the second rope.

Mike suddenly comes alive!

He grabs Marie's damaged arm!

Yanks!

Marie falls from the turnbuckles!

Mike catches her!

BELLY-TO-BACK SUPLEX!

Marie crashes down!

Mike remains on one knee.

Marie rolls onto her stomach.

Mike grabs her.

Pulls her toward the center.

SHARPSHOOTER!

Mike Best locks Marie Van Claudio in her own submission!

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAR!

JOHN PHILLIPS: "OH COME ON!"

MARK BRAVO: "MIKE BEST HAS THE SHARPSHOOTER!"

Marie screams.

Mike sits deep.

Marie reaches forward.

Ropes distant.

Amy pounds the mat.

Valkyrie shouts.

Trey and Clovis stand side-by-side.

Watching.

Marie drags herself forward.

Mike pulls her backward.

Marie cries out.

She looks toward ringside.

Amy.

Too far.

Valkyrie.

Too far.

Then Marie sees Trey.

And Clovis.

They are positioned almost directly beside the nearest bottom rope.

Marie reaches toward them.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "TREY!"

Trey looks down at her.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "HELP ME!"

Amy turns immediately.

AMY HARRISON: "TREY!"

Trey takes one step toward the apron.

The crowd reacts.

Marie reaches.

Mike pulls harder.

Marie screams again.

Clovis steps forward beside Trey.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Here they go!"

Marie reaches toward both men.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "COME ON!"

Trey looks down at her hand.

Clovis looks at Marie.

Then...

Trey looks at Clovis.

Clovis looks back.

A long beat.

Trey shakes his head.

Once.

Marie stares.

Confused.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "What are you doing?!"

Trey steps backward.

Clovis does too.

Amy's eyes widen.

AMY HARRISON: "TREY!"

Trey looks at Marie.

No smile.

No anger.

Just disappointment.

TREY MACK: "You said I wasn't pulling my weight."

Marie stares at him.

Mike keeps the Sharpshooter locked.

TREY MACK: "So do it without me."

The crowd ERUPTS.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "OH MY GOD!"

Marie shakes her head.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "NO!"

Trey turns.

Starts walking away.

AMY HARRISON: "TREY! GET BACK HERE!"

Clovis remains for another second.

Marie looks at him.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Clovis."

Clovis stares at her.

Nothing in his expression.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "CLOVIS!"

Clovis glances toward Trey.

Then back to Marie.

He says nothing.

He simply turns.

And follows Trey.

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAR!

MARK BRAVO: "THEY'RE LEAVING!"

JOHN PHILLIPS: "TREY MACK AND CLOVIS BLACK ARE WALKING OUT ON MARIE VAN CLAUDIO!"

Marie watches them go.

And that's the mistake.

For one second...

she stops fighting Mike Best.

She starts fighting what just happened.

Amy is screaming at Trey and Clovis.

Valkyrie looks between them and Marie.

Chaos at ringside.

And Mike Best feels Marie stop resisting.

He releases the Sharpshooter.

Marie immediately crawls toward the ropes.

Not to escape Mike.

To look after Trey and Clovis.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "COME BACK!"

Trey keeps walking.

Clovis beside him.

Neither looks back.

Marie pulls herself upright.

Furious.

Devastated.

Humiliated.

She leans over the ropes.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "TREY!"

Mike Best rises behind her.

Slowly.

Bad knee.

Exhausted.

But standing.

Amy sees him.

AMY HARRISON: "MARIE!"

Marie doesn't hear her.

AMY HARRISON: "MARIE!"

Mike grabs Marie from behind.

Marie suddenly realizes.

Too late.

GERMAN SUPLEX!

Marie crashes down!

Mike doesn't bridge.

He rolls through.

Pulls Marie upright.

Marie is glassy-eyed.

Mike looks toward the ramp.

Trey and Clovis are halfway up.

Then back at Marie.

MIKE BEST: "Should've focused on me."

Marie swings wildly.

Mike ducks.

HASHTAG MUTED!

SUPERKICK!

Marie drops to her knees.

Perfect position.

Amy's face changes.

She knows.

Valkyrie knows.

Madison Square Garden knows.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "NO!"

Mike Best backs into the ropes.

The crowd rises.

Marie looks up.

Mike explodes forward.

I KNEED A HERO!

CRAAAAAAAAAACK!

The running shining wizard connects flush.

Marie Van Claudio goes down.

And everybody knows.

MARK BRAVO: "THAT'S IT!"

Mike covers.

Hooks both legs.

ONE!

Amy reaches toward the ring.

TWO!

Valkyrie takes one step forward.

THREE!

DING! DING! DING!

Mike Best remains across Marie Van Claudio's chest for another second.

Not because he needs to.

Because he knows.

The referee signals toward the timekeeper.

Madison Square Garden erupts.

RING ANNOUNCER: "Here is your winner..."

Mike rolls away from Marie.

He sits up.

Breathing heavily.

One hand immediately goes to the damaged knee.

He grimaces.

Then looks toward Marie.

Still down.

RING ANNOUNCER: "...and ADVANCING to the FINAL FOUR of the 2026 RING KING TOURNAMENT..."

Mike gets one foot underneath himself.

Then the other.

RING ANNOUNCER: "THE SON OF GOD..."

Mike rises.

RING ANNOUNCER: "MIKE..."

The referee raises his arm.

RING ANNOUNCER: "BEEEEEEEEEST!"

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAR!

"Pandemonium" hits.

Mike Best does not jump.

Does not collapse in disbelief.

Does not look overwhelmed by the moment.

He simply nods.

Once.

Like the expected result has finally been announced.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Mike Best is going to Ring King!"

MARK BRAVO: "Final Four!"

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Sol Azteca. Mikey Unlikely. Kirsty McKinney. Mike Best."

MARK BRAVO: "That's your field."

The Ring King tournament graphic fills the video wall.

FINAL FOUR

SOL AZTECA

MIKEY UNLIKELY

KIRSTY McKINNEY

MIKE BEST

The final empty position fills with Mike Best's name.

Gold flashes across the bracket.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Sixteen became eight."

MARK BRAVO: "Eight became four."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "And two weeks from tomorrow in Los Angeles, one of those four will become the 2026 Ring King."

Mike looks toward the video wall.

Studies the four names.

Then slowly smiles.

No celebration.

Just recognition.

Three more people between him and what he wants.

Mike turns back toward Marie.

She has begun moving.

Slowly.

One hand against the canvas.

The other still protecting the damaged shoulder.

Amy Harrison slides into the ring.

Valkyrie Knox follows.

Both move toward Marie.

Mike watches them.

Amy kneels beside Marie.

AMY HARRISON: "Marie."

Marie doesn't answer.

AMY HARRISON: "Marie."

Marie pushes herself to one knee.

Amy reaches for her.

Marie jerks away.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Don't."

Amy freezes.

Valkyrie stands several feet away.

Watching.

Mike remains near the opposite ropes.

Still watching too.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Marie Van Claudio was seconds away from joining the Final Four."

MARK BRAVO: "More than once."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "She had Mike Best in the Sharpshooter."

MARK BRAVO: "Hit the Montreal Spinout."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "The Empire got involved repeatedly."

MARK BRAVO: "And ultimately none of that is what decided it."

The replay appears briefly on the screen.

Marie trapped in Mike's Sharpshooter.

Reaching toward Trey Mack and Clovis Black.

Trey stepping forward.

Marie believing help is coming.

Then...

Trey shaking his head.

"You said I wasn't pulling my weight."

"So do it without me."

Trey walking away.

Clovis following.

Marie turning away from Mike.

German suplex.

Hashtag Muted.

I KNEED A HERO.

Three.

Back live.

MARK BRAVO: "Marie told Trey Mack earlier tonight that he wasn't pulling his weight."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Then told him he wasn't welcome at ringside."

MARK BRAVO: "He came anyway."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "So did Clovis."

MARK BRAVO: "And just when Marie thought The Empire was whole again..."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "...they walked away."

Marie hears all of it.

She looks toward the entrance.

Trey and Clovis are gone.

No sign of either man.

Marie stares at the empty stage.

Longer than she should.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "They left."

Amy stands.

AMY HARRISON: "Forget them."

Marie slowly looks at her.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Forget them?"

AMY HARRISON: "Not now."

Marie begins standing.

Amy tries to help again.

This time Marie lets her.
Valkyrie moves closer.
Marie reaches her feet.
She looks across the ring.
Mike Best is still there.
The music has faded.
He has not left yet.
Marie stares at him.
Mike stares back.
For several seconds...
neither says anything.
Then Mike gives a small nod.
The same nod he gave earlier.
Only now it means something different.
Respect.
Not friendship.
Not sympathy.
Respect for the fight.
Marie sees it.
Her jaw tightens.
MIKE BEST: "Almost."
Marie immediately bristles.
MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Fuck you."
Mike smiles.
MIKE BEST: "Yeah."
He steps through the ropes.
Drops to the floor.
Then pauses.
Looks back toward Marie.
MIKE BEST: "You were right about one thing."
Marie stares.
MIKE BEST: "You didn't need them."
Amy's face changes.

Marie says nothing.

MIKE BEST: "Until you thought you did."

Mike turns.

Starts walking up the ramp.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "That's harsh."

MARK BRAVO: "It's also the match."

Marie watches Mike leave.

She hates that he's right.

Amy stands beside her.

Valkyrie on the other side.

Three members of The Empire remain inside Madison Square Garden.

Two do not.

Mike reaches the middle of the aisle.

The Ring King bracket appears again.

SOL AZTECA

MIKEY UNLIKELY

KIRSTY McKINNEY

MIKE BEST

Mike stops beneath it.

Looks up.

The crown appears over the four names.

Mike raises his Hall of Fame hand.

Not toward the crowd.

Toward the crown.

MIKE BEST: "Three."

He lowers one finger.

MIKE BEST: "Then two."

Another.

MIKE BEST: "Then one."

Mike looks directly into the camera.

MIKE BEST: "Then me."

He continues toward the curtain.

MARK BRAVO: "Mike Best doesn't believe tonight was the accomplishment."

JOHN PHILLIPS: "It's another step."

MARK BRAVO: "That's all."

Mike disappears backstage.

The camera returns to the ring.

Marie has not moved.

Amy says something quietly to her.

Marie doesn't respond.

Valkyrie places one hand on Marie's shoulder.

Marie flinches from the injured joint.

Valkyrie immediately removes it.

Marie looks toward the stage again.

Still empty.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "The dream of becoming Ring Queen is over."

MARK BRAVO: "Tonight."

Marie turns slightly toward Bravo's direction.

Almost like she heard him.

MARK BRAVO: "But I think something much bigger just started."

Amy looks toward the stage.

Then Marie.

And there it is again.

That look.

The calculating one.

The one Amy Harrison gets when everybody else sees a disaster...

and she sees an opportunity.

Marie finally turns toward her.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "Don't."

Amy raises both hands.

AMY HARRISON: "I didn't say anything."

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: "You didn't have to."

The tension hangs.

Valkyrie steps between them.

Not physically separating them.

Just placing herself where both can see her.

VALKYRIE KNOX: "Not tonight."

Amy looks at her.

Marie does too.

Neither argues.

Not tonight.

Marie steps through the ropes.

Amy follows.

Valkyrie last.

The three begin walking toward the back.

No entrance music.

No Empire pose.

No celebration.

Just three people walking toward an empty stage where five stood together earlier tonight.

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Two weeks from tomorrow, Ring King comes to Los Angeles."

MARK BRAVO: "And tonight we finally know the four names fighting for the crown."

The graphic returns.

RING KING 2026 — FINAL FOUR

SOL AZTECA

MIKEY UNLIKELY

KIRSTY McKINNEY

MIKE BEST

Then another graphic.

RING KING 2026

SEPTEMBER 26

CRYPTO.COM ARENA

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

The crown fades into view.

WHO WILL BE CROWNED?

JOHN PHILLIPS: "Good night from Madison Square Garden."

MARK BRAVO: "We'll see you on the Road to Ring King."

The final live image is not Mike Best.

Not the bracket.

Not even the crown.

It is Marie Van Claudio halfway up the aisle.

Amy Harrison on one side.

Valkyrie Knox on the other.

Marie looks once more toward the curtain through which Trey Mack and Clovis Black disappeared.

Then the screen fades to black.

Conclusion

[VIEW THE TOURNAMENT BRACKET HERE: Ring King 2026 — United Toughness Alliance](#)

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