

Road to the Throne: 09.18.2026

Promotion: United Toughness Alliance
Date: September 18, 2026
Location: Mid-America Center — Council Bluffs, Iowa

Preview

The semi-finals of the 2026 Ring King Tournament is here. We will determine the final two competitors to face for the opportunity to call themselves... the Ring King.

Results

Introduction

Segment

[The broadcast begins in darkness.]

For a moment, there is nothing.

Then the sound of a heartbeat.

THUMP.

A flash of SOL AZTECA connecting with the Corona Strike.

THUMP.

MIKEY UNLIKELY slips free of Samuel Scythe's grasp and folds the Fighting Champion into the inside cradle.

THUMP.

KIRSTY McKINNEY traps Maxwell Jett, leverage beating arrogance as the referee's hand crashes down for three.

THUMP.

MIKE BEST explodes forward—

I KNEED A HERO!

Marie Van Claudio collapses.

The heartbeat stops.

[BLACK.]

Four names appear individually across the screen.

SOL AZTECA.

MIKEY UNLIKELY.

KIRSTY McKINNEY.

MIKE BEST.

A voice cuts through the darkness.

NARRATOR: Sixteen entered.

Quick flashes begin accelerating across the screen.

Selina Santorino.

Bianca Page.

Samuel Scythe.

Chris Ross being attacked outside the ring.

Hakuryu blinded by Sinja's powder.

Emily Hightower staring furiously toward Bianca Page.

Marie Van Claudio reaching toward Trey Mack and Clovis Black as they walk away.

Maxwell Jett sitting in stunned disbelief after being defeated.

Bobby Dean absorbing I KNEED A HERO!

NARRATOR: Champions fell.

NARRATOR: Favorites fell.

NARRATOR: And tonight...

The montage stops.

Sol Azteca stands alone.

Mikey Unlikely adjusts the WrestleZone Championship.

Kirsty McKinney rolls her shoulders, eyes forward.

Mike Best stares directly into the camera.

NARRATOR: Four remain.

The Ring King crown appears against a black background.

NARRATOR: Before Los Angeles...

NARRATOR: ...there is one last fight.

[The opening theme EXPLODES through the Mid-America Center!]

The screen bursts into the live arena as thousands of fans are already on their feet in Council Bluffs, Iowa. Lights sweep across the crowd. Signs fill the camera frame as the hard camera catches the entire arena before pyro erupts across the entrance stage.

MARK BRAVO: COUNCIL BLUFFS, IOWA! Welcome to the final stop on the Road to the Throne!

JOHN PHILLIPS: Eight days from tonight, UTA takes over Los Angeles for Ring King 2026. But before anybody can be crowned, Mark, we have some unfinished business!

MARK BRAVO: Sixteen wrestlers began this tournament. Four remain. And before this night is over, only TWO will still be standing!

The broadcast cuts to a full-screen tournament graphic.

RING KING SEMIFINAL

SOL AZTECA vs. MIKEY UNLIKELY

RING KING SEMIFINAL

KIRSTY McKINNEY vs. MIKE BEST

JOHN PHILLIPS: Sol Azteca has spent this entire tournament trying to make one thing clear—strip away the grudges, strip away the politics, strip away the excuses, and let professional wrestling decide it. Tonight, Sol gets exactly that against one of the smartest veterans in this company.

MARK BRAVO: Mikey Unlikely has survived Chris Ross. He survived Samuel Scythe. Not because he overpowered either man, but because Mikey understands something that becomes incredibly important in a tournament like this: you don't have to dominate somebody for twenty minutes. You have to beat them for three seconds.

JOHN PHILLIPS: And then there's Kirsty McKinney.

The crowd responds loudly as Kirsty's image fills the screen.

JOHN PHILLIPS: She wasn't supposed to be here according to Maxwell Jett. She wasn't supposed to get through Hakuryu. She certainly wasn't supposed to get through Maxwell. Yet here she is.

MARK BRAVO: And now the Cinderella story gets Mike Best.

JOHN PHILLIPS: I wouldn't call her Cinderella where she can hear you.

MARK BRAVO: Excellent point.

Mike Best's image replaces Kirsty's.

MARK BRAVO: Mike Best hasn't treated this tournament like a comeback. He hasn't treated it like some sentimental journey through his career. Valkyrie Knox was an opponent. Bobby Dean was an opponent. Marie Van Claudio was an opponent. He beat all three, and now Kirsty McKinney is the next name standing between Mike Best and what he believes is inevitably his—the UTA Championship.

JOHN PHILLIPS: But Marie Van Claudio taught Mike something last week. You can believe you're better than somebody. You can believe you're more accomplished than somebody. But if you underestimate the person standing across that ring, they can make you pay for it.

MARK BRAVO: And Kirsty McKinney may be the single worst person left in this tournament to underestimate.

The tournament graphic disappears.

Now the Ring King logo dominates the massive screen.

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One by one, the announced championship matches flash across it.

UTA CHAMPIONSHIP

Chris Ross (c) vs. Madman Szalinski

UTA INTERNATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Bobby Dean (c) vs. Eric Dane Jr.

UTA UNITED STATES CHAMPIONSHIP

Hakuryu (c) vs. Yoshii

UTA HARDCORE CHAMPIONSHIP

Emily Hightower (c) vs. "Classy" Bianca Page

JOHN PHILLIPS: And that's before we even know who will compete in the Ring King Tournament Final!

MARK BRAVO: Chris Ross and Madman Szalinski are eight days away from settling something that stopped being about championship rankings a long time ago. Eric Dane Junior says Bobby Dean is a joke—and Bobby Dean appears increasingly interested in making him prove it. Yoshii gets Hakuryu with no excuses left between them. And God help anything that isn't bolted down when Emily Hightower and Bianca Page meet for the Hardcore Championship.

JOHN PHILLIPS: And that's next Saturday.

MARK BRAVO: Tonight isn't next Saturday.

A brief pause.

MARK BRAVO: Tonight, two people punch their ticket to Los Angeles.

The camera sweeps across the crowd again.

JOHN PHILLIPS: And there's plenty more happening before we get there. The Empire may be tearing itself apart in front of us. Trey Mack and Clovis Black face Amy Harrison and Valkyrie Knox tonight after what happened during Marie Van Claudio's match last week.

MARK BRAVO: And somewhere, I imagine Selina Santorino is already editing your description of that match into evidence of an anti-Selina conspiracy.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Don't joke. She'll clip that.

MARK BRAVO: She probably already has.

JOHN PHILLIPS: The #JusticeForSelina campaign rolls into Council Bluffs tonight when Selina meets one of UTA's newest faces, Hope Levitt. Hope is undefeated after winning her debut against Darren Valiant, and apparently simply existing while people like her is enough to make Selina furious.

MARK BRAVO: But beneath all the hashtags, edited videos and conspiracy theories, Selina Santorino can wrestle. Hope Levitt would be making a serious mistake if she forgot that.

The camera settles on the ring.

The Ring King crown hangs prominently in the graphics above the entranceway.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Sixteen became eight.

MARK BRAVO: Eight became four.

JOHN PHILLIPS: And tonight...

MARK BRAVO: Four become two.

The crowd rises as the opening presentation gives way to the first portion of the broadcast.

MARK BRAVO: This is United Toughness Alliance!

JOHN PHILLIPS: This is Road to the Throne!

MARK BRAVO: And the road ends TONIGHT!

Hope

Segment

The broadcast cuts away from ringside to the backstage interview area where Katy Winters stands beside one of UTA's newest additions.

Hope Levitt.

The Star Dragon is already dressed for competition and, apparently, completely incapable of standing still.

Hope rocks lightly from heel to toe as Katy turns toward her.

KATY WINTERS: Hope Levitt, two weeks ago you made your official UTA in-ring debut and defeated Darren Valiant. Tonight, you have a very different challenge in front of you when you face Selina Santorino.

Hope nods enthusiastically.

HOPE LEVITT: Yep!

Katy waits.

Hope keeps smiling.

A beat.

KATY WINTERS: ...Anything you'd like to add to that?

HOPE LEVITT: Oh!

Hope laughs.

HOPE LEVITT: Sorry. I thought there was more question coming.

Katy can't quite suppress a smile.

KATY WINTERS: There is.

HOPE LEVITT: Awesome. Nailed it.

KATY WINTERS: Selina has spent the last week continuing her #JusticeForSelina campaign online. She's released videos, clips and what she calls evidence that UTA management has deliberately worked against her.

Hope's eyes widen.

HOPE LEVITT: Oh, I watched those!

KATY WINTERS: You did?

HOPE LEVITT: Twice!

Hope holds up two fingers.

HOPE LEVITT: The second time was because I was trying to figure out what I did.

Katy raises an eyebrow.

KATY WINTERS: Selina has apparently taken issue with the amount of attention you've received since signing with UTA.

HOPE LEVITT: I know!

Hope sounds almost excited by the discovery.

HOPE LEVITT: Okay, so, lemme see if I have this right.

She starts counting on her fingers.

HOPE LEVITT: UTA hired me.

One finger.

HOPE LEVITT: Then they put me in a wrestling match.

Second finger.

HOPE LEVITT: Which feels pretty normal for a wrestling company, but whatever.

Third finger.

HOPE LEVITT: Then I beat Darren.

Fourth finger.

Hope stops.

She looks at her hand.

Then at Katy.

HOPE LEVITT: And now I'm wrestling again.

A concerned expression slowly crosses her face.

HOPE LEVITT: Katy...

Hope leans closer.

Her voice drops.

HOPE LEVITT: I think I'm corrupt now.

Katy stares at her.

Hope manages to hold the expression for approximately two seconds before breaking into a grin.

KATY WINTERS: Selina doesn't appear to think it's particularly funny.

HOPE LEVITT: Yeah.

And just like that...

Hope stops bouncing.

The smile doesn't disappear entirely, but something changes.

For the first time during the interview, she is completely still.

HOPE LEVITT: And that's the part I'm not joking about.

Hope looks toward the camera.

HOPE LEVITT: Selina is really, really good.

A beat.

HOPE LEVITT: Like... scary good.

She nods.

HOPE LEVITT: My dad's spent a lot of time trying to beat some things into my head. Fundamentals. Don't take stupid chances.

Hope pauses.

HOPE LEVITT: I'm still working on that one.

A little grin.

Then serious again.

HOPE LEVITT: But one of the big ones is that it doesn't matter how much somebody annoys you. Doesn't matter if you like them. Doesn't matter if you think they're completely full of it.

HOPE LEVITT: When that bell rings, you respect what they can do.

Hope nods toward the direction of the arena.

HOPE LEVITT: So yeah. I watched Selina.

HOPE LEVITT: Not just her videos.

HOPE LEVITT: I watched her wrestle.

There it is.

For just a few seconds, beneath all that youthful enthusiasm, we get a glimpse of the wrestler Hope Levitt is trying to become.

HOPE LEVITT: She lost to Sol. She lost to Lindsey. That doesn't mean she suddenly forgot how good she is.

HOPE LEVITT: So I'm not walking out there thinking Selina Santorino is a joke.

A beat.

The grin slowly returns.

HOPE LEVITT: I just think her videos are kinda funny.

Katy exhales through her nose.

KATY WINTERS: Somehow I don't think that clarification is going to help.

HOPE LEVITT: Probably not!

Hope begins bouncing on her toes again.

Someone off-camera signals toward gorilla position.

Hope looks over.

HOPE LEVITT: Oh! That's me!

She starts to leave.

Then stops.

Hope turns back toward Katy.

HOPE LEVITT: Wait.

KATY WINTERS: What?

HOPE LEVITT: If I win...

Hope's expression becomes incredibly serious again.

HOPE LEVITT: Do you think that means I get a hashtag?

Katy opens her mouth.

Nothing comes out.

Hope points at her.

HOPE LEVITT: Think about it!

And she's gone.

Hope practically bounces out of frame toward gorilla position.

Katy watches her leave.

She looks back into the camera.

KATY WINTERS: Hope Levitt, ladies and gentlemen.

[CUT TO RINGSIDE]

JOHN PHILLIPS: Mark, I can't decide whether that young woman is completely fearless or has absolutely no idea what she's gotten herself into.

MARK BRAVO: Both can be true.

JOHN PHILLIPS: What I will say is she understands something a lot of people watching Selina's behavior lately might forget. Take away the phone. Take away the hashtags. Take away the excuses. Selina Santorino is an exceptional professional wrestler.

MARK BRAVO: Which is precisely why this entire situation has become so frustrating to watch. Selina doesn't need a conspiracy to explain why she's capable of succeeding here. She just needs to win.

The arena lights begin to shift.

A reaction rises from the crowd.

MARK BRAVO: And Hope Levitt is about to give her the opportunity.

[HOPE LEVITT'S MUSIC HITS!]

Hope Levitt bursts through the curtain.

There is no cautious walk onto the stage.

No dramatic pause.

No attempt to manufacture a moment.

Hope simply arrives at approximately a hundred miles an hour.

The Star Dragon throws her arms into the air, bouncing in place as she takes in the Council Bluffs crowd.

Her smile stretches from ear to ear.

She points toward one side of the arena.

Then the other.

Then she takes off down the ramp.

JOHN PHILLIPS: You know, I've met people who drink six cups of coffee and don't have this much energy.

MARK BRAVO: Hope Levitt has been waiting for this opportunity. She's a second-generation wrestler, but she has been adamant about establishing herself rather than expecting her last name to do the work for her.

Hope slaps as many outstretched hands as she can reach on the way toward ringside.

She almost passes one young fan before suddenly stopping, reversing direction and darting back to make sure they get a high-five too.

Then she's moving again.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Two weeks ago she defeated Darren Valiant cleanly in her UTA debut. Tonight represents a significant step up in competition.

MARK BRAVO: And Hope knows it.

Hope reaches ringside and slides underneath the bottom rope.

She's immediately back on her feet.

One corner.

Up.

Arms raised.

Down.

Across the ring.

Up another corner.

The crowd responds to her enthusiasm as Hope hops back down and turns toward the entrance.

Her music begins to fade.

She takes one final bounce on the balls of her feet.

Then another.

Then rolls her shoulders.

The smile remains.

But her eyes stay fixed on the entranceway.

JOHN PHILLIPS: The smile is still there.

MARK BRAVO: But now it's time to find out whether Hope Levitt is still smiling when #JusticeForSelina walks through that curtain.

Hope Levitt vs. Selina Santorino

Match

Hope Levitt remains bouncing lightly on the balls of her feet as she waits.

Then the arena changes.

The opening notes of "Obsessed" by Mariah Carey hit the speakers.

The reaction is immediate.

Boos roll through the Mid-America Center.

And above the entranceway...

A gold light appears.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Oh, here we go.

The Santorino Sentinel descends into view, its ring light flickering in rapid bursts as the custom gold drone positions itself above the stage.

Then—

SELINA SANTORINO steps through the curtain.

The Dominican Diamond stops precisely where the Sentinel can find her.

Six feet tall.

Completely composed.

And holding her phone.

Of course.

Selina doesn't acknowledge the boos.

At least not directly.

Instead, she looks into her phone as she begins walking down the ramp, broadcasting every second to the people who matter most in her world.

Her Influencies.

SELINA SANTORINO: Council Bluffs!

The crowd boos louder.

Selina smiles into the phone.

SELINA SANTORINO: Oh my God. Listen to them.

She turns the phone briefly toward the crowd.

SELINA SANTORINO: That's what justice sounds like.

MARK BRAVO: I'm fairly certain that's booing.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Engagement is engagement, Mark.

Selina continues down the aisle as the Sentinel follows above her.

She turns the phone back toward herself.

SELINA SANTORINO: Influencies, we are LIVE because after everything UTA has tried to do to me, I need witnesses.

Hope watches from inside the ring.

Still smiling.

Selina notices.

Her expression immediately changes.

SELINA SANTORINO: And apparently they gave me a nepo baby.

Hope's eyebrows rise.

She points at herself.

"Me?"

Selina nods emphatically toward her phone.

Hope gives her an enthusiastic thumbs-up.

Selina looks offended that this has somehow failed to offend her.

JOHN PHILLIPS: I don't think Hope is giving Selina the reaction she wanted.

MARK BRAVO: That may be the most dangerous thing Hope Levitt could possibly do.

Selina reaches ringside and hands her phone off before gracefully vaulting onto the apron.

She steps through the ropes.

Then the performance begins.

Selina sprints across the ring, launches into a flawless front flip and lands in a flat split at center ring.

She spins across the canvas, transitions backward and rolls effortlessly to her feet.

The lights drop.

The Sentinel illuminates her from above.

Selina crosses one leg elegantly over the other.

Both hands rise toward her temples.

She slowly lowers an invisible crown onto her head.

SELINA SANTORINO: Subscribe... to become influential.

FLASH!

The Sentinel's strobe fills the arena.

The lights return.

Selina casually walks toward the corner and climbs onto the top turnbuckle.

She lounges across it.

The Sentinel floats closer.

Hope watches all of this.

She looks toward the referee.

Then back at Selina.

Then at the referee again.

Hope points toward Selina.

HOPE LEVITT: Does she always do this?

Selina's head snaps toward her.

SELINA SANTORINO: Excuse me?!

Hope smiles.

HOPE LEVITT: Just asking!

Selina hops down from the turnbuckle.

SELINA SANTORINO: Ring the bell.

DING! DING! DING!

MARK BRAVO: Here we go. Hope Levitt against Selina Santorino!

Hope immediately moves toward the center.

Selina does the same.

Hope offers a hand.

Selina looks down at it.

Then up at Hope.

Then toward the Sentinel.

Selina laughs.

Hope shrugs.

She withdraws the hand—

SELINA SLAPS HER.

The crowd erupts.

Hope's head snaps sideways.

Selina smiles.

SELINA SANTORINO: You're welcome.

Hope slowly turns her head back.

The smile is gone.

JOHN PHILLIPS: There may be that other side Katy Winters got a glimpse of earlier.

Hope shoots forward!

Selina braces—

Hope slips underneath!

Off the ropes!

Selina turns—

LEAPING FOREARM!

Selina stumbles backward!

Hope doesn't stop!

She rebounds again!

Selina swings—

Hope ducks!

She springs toward the ropes, changes direction and catches Selina with a HEADSCISSORS that sends the taller woman tumbling across the ring!

Selina rolls through and immediately gets back to her feet.

Hope charges.

Selina tries to catch her—

JAPANESE ARM DRAG!

Selina hits the canvas!

Back up!

Another arm drag!

Selina rolls underneath the bottom rope!

The crowd cheers as Hope stops herself before following.

Selina stands on the floor.

Stunned.

Hope looks down at her.

And waves.

Cheerfully.

Selina's eyes narrow.

MARK BRAVO: Hope Levitt told Katy Winters she respected Selina Santorino's ability.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Respect doesn't mean intimidation.

The Sentinel floats toward Selina.

She immediately notices.

And just like that...

The irritation disappears.

Selina straightens her hair.

She turns toward the drone.

Peace sign.

Smile.

Everything's fine.

Hope looks around at the crowd.

Then back at Selina.

She taps an imaginary watch on her wrist.

The crowd laughs.

Selina sees it.

Her smile vanishes.

She slides back underneath the ropes.

Hope comes toward her—

Selina catches her immediately!

A sharp knee drives into Hope's abdomen.

Another.

Selina grabs her wrist and sends Hope hard into the ropes.

Hope rebounds—

JUMPING CLOTHESLINE!

Hope flips inside out!

Selina lands and immediately kips back to her feet.

This time it's Selina smiling.

JOHN PHILLIPS: And there's the athleticism Hope was talking about.

MARK BRAVO: That's what gets lost underneath everything else with Selina Santorino. She's six feet tall. She's athletic. She's fast. She's technically excellent. There is absolutely nothing about her ability that requires excuses.

Selina pulls Hope up.

She controls the wrist.

Twists.

Hope rolls forward to relieve the pressure.

Selina follows.

Hope kips up.

Selina immediately sweeps her legs.

Hope hits the mat.

Selina floats over.

Front facelock.

Hope begins working toward her feet.

Selina changes grips.

She takes Hope over.

Hope lands hard.

Selina hooks the leg.

ONE!

TWO!

Hope kicks out.

Selina sits up.

She doesn't look angry.

She looks toward the Sentinel.

Selina holds two fingers approximately an inch apart.

That close.

MARK BRAVO: And there's the problem.

JOHN PHILLIPS: She had Hope down and immediately went looking for the camera.

Selina pulls Hope back up.

Hope suddenly fires a forearm!

Selina answers!

Hope again!

Selina drives a knee into the midsection.

She grabs Hope—

EXPLODER SUPLEX!

Hope crashes across the canvas!

Selina could cover.

She doesn't.

Instead she gets to her feet.

She looks toward the drone.

Then toward the ropes.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Cover her!

MARK BRAVO: Not cinematic enough.

Selina heads toward the corner.

She climbs.

The Sentinel immediately adjusts its position.

Selina looks directly into its camera.

She blows a kiss.

Then launches—

CORKSCREW MOONSAULT!

HOPE MOVES!

SELINA CRASHES!

The crowd erupts!

MARK BRAVO: There it is!

JOHN PHILLIPS: She had control! She had complete control!

Selina rolls across the canvas clutching her ribs.

Hope is still hurting herself.

Both women begin getting back to their feet.

Selina reaches hers first.

Hope charges—

STEP-UP ENZIGURI!

Selina staggers!

Hope explodes toward the corner.

Selina follows.

HERE I COME!

Charging double knees crush Selina against the turnbuckles!

Selina falls forward!

Hope catches her!

TOOTHLESS TWIST!

Selina spikes into the canvas!

Hope covers!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

SELINA KICKS OUT!

The crowd reacts.

Hope sits up.

Her eyes widen.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Hope Levitt almost had her!

MARK BRAVO: And Selina Santorino created that entire sequence herself!

Hope looks toward the corner.

Then toward Selina.

She gets to her feet.

Hope begins climbing.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Hope may be thinking Geronimo Splash!

Selina begins moving.

Hope reaches the top.

She stands.

HOPE LEVITT: GERONIMOOOO—

SELINA SPRINGS TO LIFE!

She lunges into the ropes!

Hope loses her footing!

She crashes awkwardly across the top turnbuckle!

Selina doesn't wait.

She gets underneath Hope.

Pulls her away from the corner—

POWERBOMB!

Hope crashes down!

Selina folds her over!

ONE!

TWO!

HOPE ESCAPES!

Selina stares at the referee.

Two.

The referee confirms it.

Selina looks toward the Sentinel.

The drone moves closer.

Its light finds her.

And Selina starts talking.

SELINA SANTORINO: DID YOU SEE—

Hope grabs her!

ROLL-UP!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

SELINA ESCAPES!

Both women explode back to their feet!

Hope catches Selina!

SMALL PACKAGE!

ONE!

TWO!

SELINA KICKS OUT!

Selina scrambles up!

Hope comes again—

Selina swings!

Hope ducks!

BACKSLIDE!

ONE!

TWO!

SELINA GETS OUT!

Selina rolls away.

Hope gets up immediately.

Selina doesn't.

Not yet.

She's sitting on the canvas.

Breathing heavily.

Staring at Hope.

The crowd is buzzing.

Hope motions for Selina to get up.

The Sentinel descends toward Selina again.

Its camera positions itself directly in front of her.

Waiting.

Selina looks at it.

For several seconds.

The light reflects in her eyes.

JOHN PHILLIPS: She almost lost that match three times because she couldn't stop worrying about that camera.

Selina's jaw tightens.

The Sentinel moves a little closer.

Selina raises her hand.

Hope waits across the ring.

Selina points toward the drone.

Then...

Waves it away.

The Sentinel hesitates.

Selina gestures again.

More forcefully.

MARK BRAVO: Wait a minute.

The Sentinel retreats.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Selina just sent the camera away.

Selina gets to her feet.

No smile.

No posing.

No Influencies.

She looks across the ring at Hope Levitt.

And for the first time tonight...

Hope isn't looking at the Queen of Clicks.

She's looking at a wrestler.

They meet in the middle.

Hope fires first!

Selina blocks it!

Forearm!

Hope answers!

Selina fires another!

Hope rebounds off the ropes!

Selina catches her!

Hope twists free!

She tries the headscissors again—

SELINA STOPS HER!

Hope hangs inverted for a fraction of a second before Selina uses her height and strength to pull her back upward.

Hope tries to rotate through—

Selina drives her down!

Hope rolls toward the ropes.

Selina follows immediately.

MARK BRAVO: Look at the difference!

JOHN PHILLIPS: She's not stopping!

Selina pulls Hope up.

Hope throws a desperation shot.

Selina catches the arm.

Twists behind.

Hope tries to reverse.

Selina changes position.

Knee to the body.

She whips Hope toward the ropes.

Hope jumps onto the middle rope!

She springs backward—

SELINA MOVES!

Hope lands on her feet!

She turns—

SUPERKICK!

Hope crumples!

Selina immediately covers!

ONE!

TWO!

HOPE KICKS OUT!

Selina gets straight back up.

No argument.

No disbelief.

No camera.

MARK BRAVO: That's different.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Very different.

Selina drags Hope up.

Hope suddenly explodes!

Forearm!

Another!

Selina stumbles backward!

Hope hits the ropes!

LEAPING FOREARM!

Selina goes down!

The crowd comes alive!

Hope doesn't stop!

She heads toward the corner!

Up!

JOHN PHILLIPS: Hope has another chance!

Hope steadies herself.

Selina rises.

Hope launches—

SELINA MOVES!

Hope somehow adjusts in midair and rolls through the landing!

She comes back up!

Selina is already there.

BOOT TO THE MIDSECTION!

Hope doubles over.

Selina hooks her.

Underhook.

Hope realizes what's happening.

She fights!

Selina maintains the grip!

Hope tries to twist free—

She almost does!

Selina adjusts!

HOPE BREAKS AWAY!

Hope spins—

ENZIGURI!

Selina ducks!

Hope hits the canvas!

Selina grabs her immediately!

Underhook!

No pose.

No camera.

No delay.

S.I.S.!

Hope is driven into the canvas!

Selina turns her over.

Hooks the leg.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

DING! DING! DING!

For a moment...

Selina stays there.

Breathing hard.

Looking down at Hope.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Selina Santorino wins it.

MARK BRAVO: Clean.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Absolutely clean.

Selina gets to her knees.

The referee raises her hand.

MARK BRAVO: And John, I want everybody watching to think about when this match changed.

Selina slowly stands.

MARK BRAVO: Hope Levitt nearly beat her because Selina Santorino was more interested in producing Selina Santorino than wrestling Hope Levitt.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Then she sent the drone away.

MARK BRAVO: And from that moment forward, we saw exactly how dangerous this woman can be.

Hope rolls onto her side.

Disappointed.

She gave Selina everything she had.

But tonight...

It wasn't enough.

Selina looks toward ringside.

Her eyes find the Sentinel.

She holds out her hand.

And just like that...

The Queen of Clicks comes back online.

The gold drone approaches.

Selina reaches through the ropes and retrieves her phone as well.

She immediately activates it.

Her face appears on the screen.

The smile returns.

Huge.

Vindicated.

Selina turns so Hope remains visible behind her on the canvas.

SELINA SANTORINO: DID YOU SEE THAT?!

The crowd boos.

Selina's eyes are enormous.

She can barely contain herself.

SELINA SANTORINO: Influencies! Tell me you saw that!

She turns, showing the arena.

Then herself.

SELINA SANTORINO: No controversy!

She raises one finger.

SELINA SANTORINO: No corrupt officiating!

Another.

SELINA SANTORINO: No management interference!

Another.

SELINA SANTORINO: No excuses!

Selina points toward Hope.

SELINA SANTORINO: ONE!

She points toward the canvas.

SELINA SANTORINO: TWO!

She throws three fingers toward the camera.

SELINA SANTORINO: THREE!

Selina laughs.

SELINA SANTORINO: Isn't it AMAZING what happens when everybody starts WATCHING?!

JOHN PHILLIPS: Oh no.

MARK BRAVO: She's learned absolutely nothing.

Selina paces around the ring while filming herself.

SELINA SANTORINO: For weeks I told you!

SELINA SANTORINO: I showed you!

SELINA SANTORINO: I gave you receipts!

SELINA SANTORINO: I gave you footage!

SELINA SANTORINO: I showed the whole world what they were doing to me!

She points toward the UTA logo.

SELINA SANTORINO: And the SECOND #JusticeForSelina starts trending...

Selina turns the camera back toward herself.

SELINA SANTORINO: Suddenly everything is fair.

The boos grow.

Selina smiles wider.

SELINA SANTORINO: Suddenly Selina Santorino gets a fair match.

SELINA SANTORINO: Suddenly...

She taps herself on the chest.

SELINA SANTORINO: ...I WIN.

Selina stares directly into the camera.

SELINA SANTORINO: That's not a coincidence.

MARK BRAVO: It isn't! She stopped screwing around!

JOHN PHILLIPS: Somehow I don't think that's making the upload.

Selina climbs onto the middle turnbuckle.

The Sentinel rises with her.

SELINA SANTORINO: They knew we were watching.

A beat.

SELINA SANTORINO: They knew they couldn't hide anymore.

Selina raises her fist.

SELINA SANTORINO: And tonight...

She smiles.

SELINA SANTORINO: Justice worked.

Some of the crowd boos.

But scattered among them...

A few phones rise.

A few fans make the hashtag gesture toward Selina.

Not many.

But enough.

Selina sees them.

And that's all she needs.

SELINA SANTORINO: Keep posting.

SELINA SANTORINO: Keep clipping.

SELINA SANTORINO: Keep exposing them.

She lowers the phone slightly.

SELINA SANTORINO: Because the algorithm...

Selina looks directly into the Sentinel.

SELINA SANTORINO: ...does not lie.

Peace sign.

SELINA SANTORINO: Ciao.

She ends the stream.

JOHN PHILLIPS: I don't know what's more concerning. That Selina Santorino just completely misunderstood why she won this match...

Hope has made it to a seated position now, still recovering.

JOHN PHILLIPS: ...or that she just proved there's a wrestler underneath all of this who might actually be as good as she's been telling everybody.

MARK BRAVO: That's what should concern the rest of UTA. Forget #JusticeForSelina. Forget the videos. Forget the followers. We just watched Selina Santorino remove her biggest obstacle.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Herself.

MARK BRAVO: Exactly.

Selina steps through the ropes and drops to the floor.

The Sentinel follows.

She begins walking backward up the aisle, basking in the boos and the scattered support alike.

Inside the ring, Hope gets back to her feet.

She's disappointed.

But the crowd gives her a warm response.

Hope looks around.

She exhales.

Then gives them a small smile.

Not quite as big as the one she entered with.

But it's still there.

JOHN PHILLIPS: And don't overlook Hope Levitt in all of this. This was her second UTA match. She pushed Selina Santorino to the point that Selina had to abandon every distraction and concentrate entirely on beating her.

MARK BRAVO: Hope Levitt is one-and-one in UTA. But if tonight showed us anything, that young woman belongs here.

At the top of the ramp, Selina turns around one final time.

She sees Hope standing.

Selina raises three fingers.

Hope looks at her.

Then...

Hope gives Selina a thumbs-up.

Selina's smug expression immediately tightens.

Hope smiles.

Selina rolls her eyes and disappears through the curtain, the Santorino Sentinel following behind.

JOHN PHILLIPS: I think Hope Levitt might have found another button.

MARK BRAVO: Apparently she collects them.

The camera holds briefly on Hope before the broadcast moves on.

This is The Empire

Segment

For the second time tonight, the broadcast heads backstage.

But this time...

There's considerably less smiling.

The camera finds the locker room belonging to The Empire.

All five members are here.

Marie Van Claudio stands in the center of the room.

Amy Harrison is to her right.

Valkyrie Knox stands nearby, already prepared for competition.

Across the room...

Trey Mack.

Clovis Black.

The physical separation tells the story before anyone says a word.

Five members of The Empire.

Two sides of the room.

Marie looks between Trey and Clovis.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: Well?

Trey looks at her.

TREY MACK: Well what?

Amy scoffs.

AMY HARRISON: Are you serious?

TREY MACK: Completely.

Marie takes a slow step forward.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: Last week.

Trey nods.

TREY MACK: I remember.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: Apparently not.

Marie moves another step closer.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: Because I'm waiting for you to explain yourself.

Trey actually laughs.

Not loudly.

Not mockingly.

More out of disbelief.

TREY MACK: Explain myself?

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: Yes.

Trey looks toward Clovis.

Clovis doesn't react.

He simply stands beside his partner.

Trey turns back toward Marie.

TREY MACK: Okay.

He steps forward.

TREY MACK: You told me I wasn't pulling my weight.

Marie doesn't respond.

TREY MACK: You told me Kairo figured me out.

Another step.

TREY MACK: You dragged Clovis into it.

Clovis' eyes remain locked on Marie.

TREY MACK: Then you told me you didn't want me out there with you.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: And yet you came anyway.

TREY MACK: Yeah.

A beat.

TREY MACK: Because despite all that?

Trey motions around the locker room.

TREY MACK: I still believed in this.

That lands.

TREY MACK: All the way Empire.

For just a second, nobody speaks.

Because they've heard Trey say those words before.

Marie finally answers.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: Then you have a very strange way of showing it.

Trey's expression hardens.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: Because when I needed you...

Marie points directly at him.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: ...you walked away.

TREY MACK: No.

Immediate.

TREY MACK: When you decided you needed me.

Marie narrows her eyes.

TREY MACK: That's different.

Amy pushes away from the wall.

AMY HARRISON: Oh, give me a break.

Trey turns toward her.

AMY HARRISON: She was in a match. Mike Best had her trapped. She called for her team.

Amy points toward Trey.

AMY HARRISON: And you stood there trying to teach her a lesson.

TREY MACK: She wanted to prove she didn't need me.

AMY HARRISON: She was angry!

TREY MACK: So was I!

The volume jumps.

Valkyrie immediately shifts her position.

Not between them.

Not yet.

But ready.

Trey lowers his voice again.

TREY MACK: I've spent how long trying to keep this group from ripping itself apart?

He looks at Amy.

TREY MACK: You and her couldn't be in the same room without somebody questioning who was in charge.

Amy's jaw tightens.

TREY MACK: Valkyrie's trying to keep everybody from killing each other.

Valkyrie doesn't dispute it.

TREY MACK: I'm trying to remind everybody that we're supposed to be a damn unit.

He points toward Clovis.

TREY MACK: He's doing his job.

Then Trey points toward himself.

TREY MACK: I'm doing mine.

Finally...

Marie.

TREY MACK: And every time something goes wrong, you decide one of us must be the problem.

Silence.

Marie stares at him.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: Are you finished?

Trey shakes his head.

TREY MACK: That's the problem, Marie.

A beat.

TREY MACK: I'm not.

Marie steps directly into his space.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: Neither am I.

The room becomes very still.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: You want to talk about unity?

Marie motions around the room.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: This is The Empire.

She taps herself on the chest.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: I built this.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: I lead this.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: And last week, when I called for two members of The Empire...

Her eyes shift toward Clovis.

Then back to Trey.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: ...they turned their backs on me.

Trey starts to answer.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: No.

Marie raises a hand.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: You wanted me to do it without you?

She nods slowly.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: Fine.

Marie takes a step backward.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: Tonight...

She gestures toward Amy and Valkyrie.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: ...they do it without you.

Amy smiles.

Not pleasantly.

Valkyrie rolls her shoulders.

Trey looks between them.

TREY MACK: So that's what this is?

Marie says nothing.

TREY MACK: Punishment?

AMY HARRISON: Call it whatever makes you feel better.

Trey turns toward Amy.

AMY HARRISON: You wanted Marie to prove she could handle herself?

Amy takes a step toward him.

AMY HARRISON: Tonight you prove you can handle us.

Trey nods slowly.

TREY MACK: There it is.

Amy raises an eyebrow.

TREY MACK: That's exactly what I'm talking about.

AMY HARRISON: What's that supposed to mean?

TREY MACK: Nobody in this room wants to fix anything anymore.

He looks around.

TREY MACK: Everybody just wants to win the argument.

That one lands harder than Amy expected.

Valkyrie finally speaks.

VALKYRIE KNOX: Then stop talking.

Everyone looks toward her.

Valkyrie steps forward.

VALKYRIE KNOX: We've talked.

She looks at Marie.

Then Amy.

Then Trey.

Then Clovis.

VALKYRIE KNOX: For weeks.

A beat.

VALKYRIE KNOX: Look where it got us.

She turns toward Trey.

VALKYRIE KNOX: You think you were right last week?

Trey doesn't hesitate.

TREY MACK: Yeah.

Valkyrie nods.

Then toward Marie.

VALKYRIE KNOX: You think they betrayed you?

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: They did.

Valkyrie nods again.

VALKYRIE KNOX: Good.

She points toward the door.

VALKYRIE KNOX: Ring's that way.

Amy smiles.

AMY HARRISON: Finally.

She starts toward the door.

Valkyrie follows.

But Marie remains.

She looks at Trey.

Then Clovis.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: One more thing.

Amy and Valkyrie stop.

Trey waits.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: Don't misunderstand tonight.

Marie looks directly into Trey's eyes.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: This isn't The Empire against Trey Mack and Clovis Black.

A beat.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: This is The Empire finding out whether Trey Mack and Clovis Black still belong in it.

Trey absorbs that.

Then slowly nods.

TREY MACK: Funny.

Marie raises an eyebrow.

TREY MACK: I was wondering the same thing.

Marie's expression hardens.

But before she can answer—

Clovis steps forward.

For the first time in the entire conversation.

He moves beside Trey.

Shoulder to shoulder.

His eyes stay on Marie.

CLOVIS BLACK: We done?

Marie stares at him.

Clovis waits.

Finally...

Marie steps aside.

Clovis looks toward Trey.

CLOVIS BLACK: Let's work.

Trey nods.

TREY MACK: All the way.

Clovis opens the locker room door.

Trey follows him through.

Neither man looks back.

The door closes.

Marie remains standing in the center of the room.

Amy watches her.

Valkyrie watches the door.

For several seconds...

Nobody says anything.

Then Amy breaks the silence.

AMY HARRISON: You coming?

Marie looks toward her.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: Of course.

Marie heads toward the door.

Valkyrie catches her with a question before she reaches it.

VALKYRIE KNOX: Marie.

Marie stops.

VALKYRIE KNOX: What happens if they win?

Silence.

Amy looks toward Marie.

Marie doesn't turn around.

Several seconds pass.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: They won't.

Marie exits.

Amy follows.

Valkyrie remains behind for just a moment.

She looks toward the closed door.

Not convinced.

Then she follows them out.

[CUT TO RINGSIDE]

JOHN PHILLIPS: Well, that answered absolutely nothing.

MARK BRAVO: I disagree. It answered one thing. Whatever The Empire was a month ago, that's not what it is tonight.

JOHN PHILLIPS: And we're about to put four members of it inside the same ring.

MARK BRAVO: With Marie Van Claudio watching.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Trey Mack and Clovis Black against Amy Harrison and Valkyrie Knox.

MARK BRAVO: And I don't think anybody—not even Marie—knows what The Empire looks like when this one is over.

Clusterfuck

Segment

Scott Stevens is sitting behind his desk.

Or at least...

We assume there's a desk.

It's difficult to see much of anything at the moment.

Because Scott's office is full.

Very full.

Yoshii stands along one side of the room.

All five hundred and eighty-three pounds of him.

Beside Yoshii is Jed Eye, holding a folder underneath one arm and standing with the posture of a man who has prepared documentation for a meeting nobody else knew required documentation.

Across from them...

Hakuryu.

The United States Championship rests over the White Dragon's shoulder.

Sinja stands slightly behind him.

Hakuryu's eyes have not left Yoshii.

Yoshii's eyes have not left Hakuryu.

Then there's the other problem.

Bobby Dean leans against the wall near the door, the International Championship resting over his shoulder.

And approximately six inches farther into the room than anyone wants him to be...

Eric Dane Jr.

Eric looks around.

ERIC DANE JR.: So this is your office?

Scott looks up.

SCOTT STEVENS: Yes.

Eric nods slowly.

ERIC DANE JR.: Huh.

Scott waits.

ERIC DANE JR.: Smaller than I expected.

SCOTT STEVENS: Get out.

Eric blinks.

ERIC DANE JR.: You called me in here.

SCOTT STEVENS: And somehow I'm already regretting it.

Bobby snorts.

Eric turns.

ERIC DANE JR.: Something funny?

BOBBY DEAN: Little bit.

Eric looks at the International Championship.

Bobby notices.

He adjusts it slightly higher onto his shoulder.

Eric notices that, too.

Scott slaps both hands onto his desk.

SCOTT STEVENS: Enough.

Everyone looks toward him.

Almost everyone.

Hakuryu is still staring at Yoshii.

Yoshii is still staring at Hakuryu.

Scott looks between them.

SCOTT STEVENS: That includes you two.

Nothing.

Scott exhales.

SCOTT STEVENS: Here's where we are.

He points toward Bobby.

SCOTT STEVENS: International Champion.

Then Eric.

SCOTT STEVENS: Challenger.

Hakuryu.

SCOTT STEVENS: United States Champion.

Yoshii.

SCOTT STEVENS: Challenger.

Scott leans back.

SCOTT STEVENS: Eight days.

SCOTT STEVENS: That's all I'm asking for.

SCOTT STEVENS: Eight days until Los Angeles.

He points toward Eric.

SCOTT STEVENS: I don't want you jumping Bobby.

Eric puts a hand against his chest.

ERIC DANE JR.: Why would I jump Bobby?

Scott just stares at him.

ERIC DANE JR.: Seriously.

Eric motions toward Bobby.

ERIC DANE JR.: Look at him.

Bobby looks down at himself.

Then back at Eric.

ERIC DANE JR.: Does that look like something Eric Dane Junior needs a tactical advantage against?

Bobby considers this.

BOBBY DEAN: I think I look nice.

ERIC DANE JR.: Nobody asked you.

BOBBY DEAN: You said look at me.

Eric closes his eyes.

BOBBY DEAN: So I did.

A beat.

BOBBY DEAN: Pretty good.

ERIC DANE JR.: Jesus Christ.

SCOTT STEVENS: Eric.

Eric turns back toward Scott.

SCOTT STEVENS: Eight days.

Then Scott turns toward the other side.

SCOTT STEVENS: And that brings me to this.

His attention settles on Sinja.

Sinja stands rigidly.

SCOTT STEVENS: Last week was enough.

Sinja's expression tightens.

SCOTT STEVENS: No parking lots.

SCOTT STEVENS: No sneak attacks.

SCOTT STEVENS: No finishing what you started.

Hakuryu finally looks away from Yoshii.

His eyes move toward Scott.

Scott meets them.

SCOTT STEVENS: Yoshii gets you at Ring King.

Hakuryu says nothing.

SCOTT STEVENS: That's what he asked for.

SCOTT STEVENS: That's what I gave him.

Yoshii nods.

YOSHII: Yoshii ready.

Hakuryu slowly turns his head toward him.

His hands come together.

Prayer position.

He closes his eyes.

Quietly...

HAKURYU: ???????????

Sinja translates.

SINJA: In Los Angeles...

Sinja looks toward Yoshii.

SINJA: ...it ends.

The smile disappears from Yoshii's face.

YOSHII: Yes.

A beat.

YOSHII: End.

The tension rises.

Jed immediately steps forward.

JED EYE: Fact. For purposes of clarification, my client does not accept the implied outcome contained within that particular declarative statement.

Everyone looks at Jed.

Jed adjusts his glasses.

JED EYE: Merely the proposed conclusion of hostilities on the specified date.

Yoshii looks at Jed.

YOSHII: Jed.

JED EYE: Yes?

YOSHII: Shhh.

Jed closes his mouth.

JED EYE: Understood.

Eric looks around the room.

ERIC DANE JR.: Are we done now?

Scott slowly turns toward him.

ERIC DANE JR.: Because I've got things to do.

SCOTT STEVENS: Like?

ERIC DANE JR.: Superstar shit.

Bobby looks toward Eric.

BOBBY DEAN: What's that?

Eric turns.

ERIC DANE JR.: Something you wouldn't understand.

BOBBY DEAN: Okay.

Eric stares at him.

There's that response again.

That same infuriating lack of outrage Eric got from Bobby last week.

ERIC DANE JR.: You know, this thing you're doing?

BOBBY DEAN: Standing?

ERIC DANE JR.: No.

BOBBY DEAN: Breathing?

ERIC DANE JR.: Bobby.

BOBBY DEAN: Eating?

Eric pauses.

ERIC DANE JR.: You're not eating.

Bobby's eyes widen slightly.

He looks down.

Checks both hands.

BOBBY DEAN: Huh.

He looks genuinely concerned.

BOBBY DEAN: You're right.

Scott pinches the bridge of his nose.

ERIC DANE JR.: THIS.

Eric gestures wildly at Bobby.

ERIC DANE JR.: This whole thing where you pretend none of this bothers you.

Bobby's expression changes.

Just slightly.

ERIC DANE JR.: I'm standing here telling you I'm taking your championship next Saturday and you keep acting like we're talking about the weather.

Bobby looks at Eric.

BOBBY DEAN: I'm listening.

ERIC DANE JR.: Then SAY something.

Bobby looks at the International Championship.

Then at Eric.

BOBBY DEAN: You want me to tell you you're good?

Eric smirks.

ERIC DANE JR.: It's a start.

BOBBY DEAN: You're good.

That catches Eric slightly off guard.

Bobby continues.

BOBBY DEAN: You're fast.

BOBBY DEAN: You're athletic.

BOBBY DEAN: You're willing to do stuff that I'm pretty sure hasn't occurred to anybody else because most people have survival instincts.

Eric's smirk returns.

BOBBY DEAN: And next Saturday...

Bobby taps the International Championship.

BOBBY DEAN: ...I'm taking you seriously.

Eric's smile fades a little.

BOBBY DEAN: Mike Best taught me something.

Now Bobby's smile disappears completely.

BOBBY DEAN: Not about you.

A beat.

BOBBY DEAN: About me.

Eric's eyes drop briefly toward the championship.

BOBBY DEAN: So you can keep telling everybody what a superstar looks like.

Bobby adjusts the belt on his shoulder.

BOBBY DEAN: I'm gonna keep being the champion.

Silence.

Eric stares at Bobby.

Then he laughs.

ERIC DANE JR.: See, that's cute.

He steps closer.

ERIC DANE JR.: Because you still don't understand.

ERIC DANE JR.: You watched me last week.

BOBBY DEAN: Yep.

ERIC DANE JR.: You watched the entrance.

BOBBY DEAN: Yep.

ERIC DANE JR.: You watched what I did to Darren Valiant.

BOBBY DEAN: Yep.

Eric spreads his arms.

ERIC DANE JR.: Then you already know what happens when somebody like you gets in the ring with somebody like me.

Bobby thinks about it.

BOBBY DEAN: No.

Eric's eyebrows rise.

BOBBY DEAN: I know what happened when Darren got in the ring with you.

A beat.

BOBBY DEAN: I'm Bobby.

Eric's face hardens.

ERIC DANE JR.: You wanna find out early?

Bobby immediately pushes away from the wall.

BOBBY DEAN: Sure.

Scott stands.

SCOTT STEVENS: NO.

Both men look at him.

Scott points at Eric.

SCOTT STEVENS: You don't touch him.

Then Bobby.

SCOTT STEVENS: You don't touch him.

Then Yoshii and Hakuryu.

SCOTT STEVENS: And you two stop staring at each other like you're about to destroy my office.

Yoshii looks around.

He gently pats one of the walls.

YOSHII: Nice office.

Scott points toward him.

SCOTT STEVENS: Thank you.

YOSHII: Yoshii not destroy.

SCOTT STEVENS: I appreciate that.

Eric rolls his eyes.

ERIC DANE JR.: This is ridiculous.

Scott hears him.

SCOTT STEVENS: You know what?

Eric freezes.

Scott looks around the room.

Something clicks.

SCOTT STEVENS: Fine.

Scott sits back down.

SCOTT STEVENS: You want Bobby?

Eric smiles.

ERIC DANE JR.: Finally.

Scott looks toward Hakuryu.

SCOTT STEVENS: You want Yoshii?

Hakuryu slowly turns his head.

His eyes settle on Yoshii.

HAKURYU: ???

Sinja doesn't need to translate.

Scott nods.

SCOTT STEVENS: Congratulations.

A beat.

SCOTT STEVENS: Tonight's main event.

Everyone looks at him.

SCOTT STEVENS: Bobby Dean and Yoshii...

Yoshii's grin returns.

He looks toward Bobby.

Bobby looks waaaaaay up toward Yoshii.

BOBBY DEAN: Hi.

YOSHII: Bobby!

Yoshii enthusiastically pats Bobby on the shoulder.

Bobby nearly disappears into the wall.

BOBBY DEAN: Ow.

SCOTT STEVENS: ...against Eric Dane Junior...

Eric's smile grows.

SCOTT STEVENS: ...and Hakuryu.

Hakuryu shows no reaction.

Eric looks toward him.

Then looks again.

He seems to be evaluating his new partner.

ERIC DANE JR.: Okay.

Eric nods.

ERIC DANE JR.: I can work with that.

Hakuryu slowly turns his head toward Eric.

Eric notices.

ERIC DANE JR.: You don't have to look so excited.

Hakuryu turns away.

ERIC DANE JR.: We're gonna work on communication.

Sinja looks at Eric.

For once...

Sinja appears to pity someone.

Scott raises a hand.

SCOTT STEVENS: I'm not finished.

The room quiets.

Scott points toward Sinja.

SCOTT STEVENS: Sinja.

Then Jed.

SCOTT STEVENS: Jed.

Jed straightens immediately.

JED EYE: Present.

SCOTT STEVENS: You're both allowed at ringside.

Jed nods.

Sinja remains still.

SCOTT STEVENS: You can coach.

SCOTT STEVENS: You can yell.

SCOTT STEVENS: You can glare at each other.

SCOTT STEVENS: You can play chess for all I care.

JED EYE: Statistically, I would have a significant—

SCOTT STEVENS: Jed.

JED EYE: Withdrawn.

Scott turns back toward Sinja.

SCOTT STEVENS: But neither one of you touches anybody in that match.

Sinja's expression changes.

Just slightly.

SCOTT STEVENS: Not Bobby.

SCOTT STEVENS: Not Eric.

SCOTT STEVENS: Not Yoshii.

SCOTT STEVENS: Not Hakuryu.

SCOTT STEVENS: And definitely not each other.

Jed slowly lowers his folder.

JED EYE: And if Sinja violates these terms?

SCOTT STEVENS: Then Sinja's gone.

Scott looks at Jed.

SCOTT STEVENS: And if you violate them...

A beat.

SCOTT STEVENS: ...you're gone.

Jed considers this.

JED EYE: Equitable.

Sinja looks toward Hakuryu.

Hakuryu slowly turns his head.

The White Dragon's eyes meet his disciple's.

Nothing is said.

Nothing needs to be.

Strike one.

No strike three.

Sinja lowers his head.

SINJA: Understood.

Scott nods.

SCOTT STEVENS: Good.

He points toward the door.

SCOTT STEVENS: Now all of you get out of my office.

Eric immediately heads for the door.

He stops beside Bobby.

ERIC DANE JR.: Guess you don't have to wait eight days.

Bobby looks at him.

BOBBY DEAN: Guess not.

Eric smiles.

ERIC DANE JR.: Try to keep up tonight.

He pats the International Championship.

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

The smile disappears.

Eric sees it.

He removes his hand.

Slowly.

BOBBY DEAN: Eric.

Eric stops.

BOBBY DEAN: Don't touch my belt.

There's nothing comedic in Bobby's voice.

Eric studies him.

Then smiles.

ERIC DANE JR.: For now.

Eric exits.

Bobby watches him leave.

Across the room, Yoshii and Hakuryu pass each other.

They stop.

Face-to-face.

The enormous former sumo champion and the White Dragon.

Yoshii's expression is serious.

Hakuryu's is unreadable.

Hakuryu brings his hands together.

He bows his head.

Yoshii responds with a bow of his own.

Respectful.

But neither moves.

Finally...

Yoshii speaks.

YOSHII: Tonight...

He points toward Hakuryu.

YOSHII: Yoshii fight.

Then toward the United States Championship.

YOSHII: Next week...

A beat.

YOSHII: Yoshii win.

Hakuryu slowly raises his head.

HAKURYU: ???

Sinja translates quietly.

SINJA: A dream.

Yoshii's eyes narrow.

Then...

His smile returns.

Not the giant fan-friendly grin.

The smaller one.

The serious one.

YOSHII: Good dream.

Yoshii turns and walks out.

Jed hurries after him.

Hakuryu follows moments later, Sinja trailing behind.

Bobby is the last wrestler remaining.

Scott looks at him.

SCOTT STEVENS: Bobby.

BOBBY DEAN: Yeah?

SCOTT STEVENS: Out.

Bobby nods.

BOBBY DEAN: Right.

He starts through the door.

Stops.

BOBBY DEAN: Scott?

Scott closes his eyes.

SCOTT STEVENS: What?

BOBBY DEAN: You got snacks in here?

Scott points toward the hallway without opening his eyes.

SCOTT STEVENS: OUT.

Bobby leaves.

The door closes.

Silence.

Scott sits behind his desk.

He stares at the door.

Then at the ceiling.

SCOTT STEVENS: Eight days.

He exhales.

SCOTT STEVENS: Just eight more days.

[CUT TO RINGSIDE]

JOHN PHILLIPS: Well, there you have it! Scott Stevens just made a massive main event for tonight!

MARK BRAVO: Bobby Dean and Yoshii against Eric Dane Junior and the United States Champion, Hakuryu!

JOHN PHILLIPS: Eight days before Bobby defends the International Championship against Eric Dane Junior and Hakuryu defends the United States Championship against Yoshii at Ring King!

MARK BRAVO: And Scott Stevens may have solved one problem by creating an even bigger one. Those four don't have to wait until Los Angeles to get their hands on each other anymore.

JOHN PHILLIPS: That's coming later tonight. But right now, we've got another situation that's been boiling all week.

MARK BRAVO: The Empire.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Trey Mack and Clovis Black walked away from Marie Van Claudio when she needed them last week. We've already heard what everyone involved thinks about it tonight.

MARK BRAVO: Talking time is over. Amy Harrison and Valkyrie Knox against Trey Mack and Clovis Black...

JOHN PHILLIPS: ...is next.

Trey Mack & Clovis Black vs. Amy Harrison & Valkyrie Knox

Match

The atmosphere inside the Mid-America Center changes.

Because this isn't really supposed to happen.

Not like this.

Members of The Empire have competed against one another before.

They've argued.

They've fought.

They've disagreed over leadership.

But tonight feels different.

Tonight, nobody is pretending this is friendly competition.

JOHN PHILLIPS: You heard what was said backstage. You saw how that room was divided. And now we're actually going to put four members of The Empire in the ring against one another.

MARK BRAVO: Four members of The Empire, John. But I'm not sure we've got one Empire anymore.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Marie Van Claudio certainly believes we do.

MARK BRAVO: Marie believes a lot of things.

A heavy funk-rap beat crashes through the arena.

The crowd immediately reacts.

Not quite the reaction Trey Mack is accustomed to hearing.

There are still boos.

But underneath them...

Cheers.

More than usual.

Trey Mack steps through the curtain.

No grin tonight.

No exaggerated swagger.

No attempt to get underneath anybody's skin.

He simply rolls his shoulders and looks toward the ring.

Then—

A freight horn BLARES through the arena.

The industrial beat accompanying Clovis Black takes over.

Clovis emerges through the curtain.

Hood up.

Eyes forward.

All business.

He walks until he's beside Trey.

Then stops.

The two men look at one another.

No conversation.

Trey nods.

Clovis nods back.

They start down the ramp together.

JOHN PHILLIPS: There is something you cannot overlook here. Whatever is happening with The Empire, whatever happens after tonight, those two men are a team.

MARK BRAVO: That's the difference. Amy Harrison and Valkyrie Knox belong to the same faction. Mack and Black actually function as a tag team.

JOHN PHILLIPS: And after everything that happened last week, there doesn't appear to be any question about where Clovis Black stands.

MARK BRAVO: Marie told Trey he wasn't pulling his weight. She dragged Clovis into it. Then when everybody else walked out of that locker room, Clovis stayed with Trey.

Trey reaches ringside and hops onto the apron.

He grabs the top rope.

SPRINGS over it.

Two hundred and ninety pounds landing inside the ring.

That gets another reaction.

Clovis doesn't bother.

He steps through the ropes.

Trey begins bouncing lightly on the balls of his feet.

Clovis removes his coat.

Then both men turn toward the entrance.

The lights shift.

Pink.

Blue.

The eerie opening of Sanctify Me begins.

Amy Harrison steps onto the stage.

She flicks her hair back.

Smirks.

And waits.

Thunder rolls.

The colors around the stage darken into deep purple.

A war-horn bellows.

Smoke crawls across the entrance.

Valkyrie Knox emerges beside Amy.

The Iron Valkyrie raises her gauntleted arm toward the rafters.

Then lowers it.

Her eyes find the ring.

Amy looks toward her.

Valkyrie looks toward Amy.

They begin walking.

And then...

Marie Van Claudio emerges behind them.

The reaction changes immediately.

Marie stops at the top of the ramp.

She looks toward Amy.

Then Valkyrie.

Then toward the ring.

At Trey.

At Clovis.

MARK BRAVO: And there's the woman who may be holding all of this together.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Or pulling it apart.

MARK BRAVO: That's the question, isn't it?

Marie starts down the ramp behind Amy and Valkyrie.

Inside the ring, Trey watches her.

Clovis doesn't appear to care.

At least...

He doesn't show it.

Amy reaches ringside first.

She climbs the steps and demands the ropes be opened for her.

Valkyrie climbs onto the apron on the opposite side.

Marie remains on the floor.

Amy enters.

Valkyrie steps over the middle rope.

And suddenly...

All four competitors are standing inside the same ring.

Trey Mack.

Clovis Black.

Amy Harrison.

Valkyrie Knox.

Marie Van Claudio watches from ringside.

Nobody moves.

The referee looks between them.

Then gestures that each team needs to select who will begin.

Amy immediately steps through the ropes.

Valkyrie remains.

Across the ring...

Trey looks toward Clovis.

Clovis starts forward.

Trey reaches out.

Touches him on the shoulder.

TREY MACK: I got it.

Clovis looks at him.

Trey nods.

TREY MACK: Let me.

A pause.

Clovis steps through the ropes.

That leaves Trey Mack and Valkyrie Knox.

The bell rings.

DING! DING!

Neither moves.

Valkyrie stares at Trey.

Trey stares back.

JOHN PHILLIPS: And here we go.

MARK BRAVO: Maybe.

Trey takes one step toward the center.

Valkyrie does the same.

Another.

Another.

Until they are standing almost chest-to-chest.

Valkyrie doesn't blink.

Trey glances toward Marie.

Marie watches closely.

Then Trey looks back at Valkyrie.

TREY MACK: We really doing this?

Valkyrie says nothing.

TREY MACK: Val?

Nothing.

Trey exhales.

TREY MACK: Okay.

He raises his hands.

They lock up.

Immediately—

Valkyrie DRIVES Trey backward!

Trey plants his feet.

Stops her.

He shifts his hips.

Now Trey drives Valkyrie backward.

They reach the ropes.

The referee calls for the break.

Trey releases immediately.

Hands up.

Clean.

Valkyrie stares at him.

Trey backs away.

MARK BRAVO: Interesting.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Clean break.

MARK BRAVO: Trey's treating this like he's wrestling somebody he still considers a teammate.

They circle again.

Another lockup.

This time Valkyrie shifts behind.

Trey catches the arm.

Turns through.

Valkyrie fires a knee toward his midsection—

Trey catches it!

Valkyrie balances on one leg.

Trey could sweep her.

Could drive her down.

Instead...

He releases the leg.

Backs away.

Valkyrie's eyes narrow.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Trey had an opening.

MARK BRAVO: And didn't take it.

Valkyrie advances.

Trey holds up both hands.

TREY MACK: Come on. We don't have to—

THUD!

Valkyrie SLAMS a forearm across his jaw.

Trey's head snaps sideways.

The crowd reacts.

He slowly turns back toward her.

Valkyrie remains directly in front of him.

No apology.

No hesitation.

Trey rubs his jaw.

Looks toward Marie.

Marie gives him absolutely nothing.

Trey looks toward Amy.

Amy smiles from the apron.

AMY HARRISON: What's wrong, Trey?

Amy spreads her arms.

AMY HARRISON: Pull your weight.

The crowd reacts.

Trey's eyes lock onto Amy.

Clovis immediately steps closer to the ropes.

Marie hears it.

She doesn't correct Amy.

Trey sees that, too.

He turns back toward Valkyrie.

His jaw tightens.

TREY MACK: Fine.

Valkyrie steps forward—

Trey BLASTS her with a forearm!

Valkyrie staggers backward!

Another!

Another!

Valkyrie answers with one of her own!

Trey fires back!

Valkyrie!

Trey!

Valkyrie!

TREY!

The crowd comes alive as the restraint disappears.

Valkyrie swings again—

Trey ducks!

Hits the ropes!

He comes back with startling speed—

BOOM!

RUNNING CROSSBODY!

Valkyrie goes down!

Trey rolls through to his feet.

The crowd ROARS.

Trey doesn't celebrate.

He doesn't shout.

He looks down at Valkyrie.

Then toward Amy.

Then Marie.

TREY MACK: That enough?

Marie doesn't answer.

Valkyrie rises behind him.

Trey turns—

WHAM!

RUNNING BIG BOOT!

Trey crashes onto his back.

Valkyrie immediately drops into the cover.

ONE!

TWO!

Trey powers out!

Valkyrie gets to her feet.

No frustration.

No wasted movement.

She grabs Trey by the wrist.

Pulls him toward her corner.

Amy extends her hand.

TAG!

Amy enters.

And unlike Valkyrie...

Amy is smiling.

AMY HARRISON: Hi.

Trey stares at her.

Amy slaps him.

SMACK!

The smile disappears from Trey's face.

Amy immediately backs toward the ropes.

AMY HARRISON: What?

She holds her hands out.

AMY HARRISON: We're wrestling.

Trey takes a step toward her.

Amy slips through the ropes.

The referee immediately gets between them.

JOHN PHILLIPS: And Amy Harrison knows exactly what she's doing.

MARK BRAVO: Trey was trying not to make this personal.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Amy is making damn sure he doesn't have that option.

Amy steps back inside.

Trey charges—

Amy ducks underneath!

Trey hits the ropes.

Amy turns—

Trey comes back!

Amy drops!

Trey clears her!

Opposite ropes!

Amy rises—

TREY EXPLODES THROUGH HER WITH A SHOULDER BLOCK!

Amy flips backward onto the canvas!

Trey stops.

Looks down.

For half a second...

he looks like he might apologize.

Amy looks up at him.

AMY HARRISON: What are you waiting for?

Trey's expression changes.

He hits the ropes.

Rolling senton—

AMY MOVES!

Trey crashes hard!

Amy immediately grabs him by the head.

JAWBREAKER!

Trey staggers backward.

Amy charges—

DIVING CROSSBODY!

Trey catches her!

The crowd rises!

Amy's eyes widen.

Trey has her across his chest.

He looks toward Clovis.

Clovis extends his hand.

Trey carries Amy toward the corner.

TAG!

Clovis enters.

Trey tosses Amy toward him—

CLOVIS CATCHES HER!

OVERHEAD BELLY-TO-BELLY SUPLEX!

Amy flies across the ring!

She crashes hard!

The building erupts.

Clovis stands.

No pose.

No celebration.

He walks toward Amy.

Amy scrambles backward.

For the first time tonight...

the smile is gone.

MARK BRAVO: And here is the problem Marie may have overlooked.

JOHN PHILLIPS: What's that?

MARK BRAVO: She questioned whether those two were pulling their weight.

Clovis grabs Amy.

Hauls her to her feet.

MARK BRAVO: Now she's given them an opportunity to show her.

Amy throws a forearm.

Clovis barely reacts.

Another.

Clovis stares at her.

Amy backs up.

Clovis advances.

Amy suddenly reaches up—

Rakes the eyes!

The referee immediately admonishes her.

Amy ignores him.

She runs toward the ropes—

Clovis turns blindly—

AMY SPEARS HIM!

Clovis stumbles backward...

But doesn't fall.

Amy looks up.

Her expression says everything.

AMY HARRISON: Oh, shit.

Clovis grabs her.

BLACKOUT SLAM!

BOOM!

Amy is planted into the canvas!

Clovis hooks the leg.

ONE!

TWO!

VALKYRIE BREAKS IT UP!

Valkyrie stomps down across Clovis' back.

Trey immediately enters!

The referee moves toward him—

Valkyrie retreats to her corner.

Trey stops.

Clovis looks toward him.

Trey looks at Valkyrie.

Then Amy.

Then Marie.

Marie is standing at ringside with her arms folded.

Watching.

Judging.

Trey steps back through the ropes.

Clovis turns toward Amy.

Amy crawls toward her corner.

Clovis catches her ankle.

Amy reaches.

Valkyrie extends her hand.

Clovis drags Amy backward.

Amy kicks desperately with her free leg.

Once.

Twice.

The third catches Clovis across the jaw.

His grip loosens.

Amy lunges—

TAG!

Valkyrie enters.

Clovis straightens.

Valkyrie steps toward him.

They meet in the center.

Neither backs down.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Oh boy.

MARK BRAVO: Now this...

Valkyrie looks up slightly at Clovis.

Clovis looks down slightly at Valkyrie.

MARK BRAVO: ...I've been waiting for.

Valkyrie throws the first forearm.

THUD!

Clovis answers.

THUD!

Valkyrie.

Clovis.

Valkyrie.

Clovis.

The strikes become harder.

Louder.

The crowd begins reacting to every impact.

Valkyrie drives a knee into Clovis' stomach.

She hooks him.

Tries to lift—

Clovis blocks!

Valkyrie tries again!

Clovis plants his feet!

Then Clovis hooks Valkyrie around the waist.

DEADLIFT—

Valkyrie blocks!

Back elbow!

Another!

Clovis releases!

Valkyrie runs the ropes—

CLOVIS MEETS HER WITH A RUNNING BODY BLOCK!

Both competitors collide!

Valkyrie staggers backward.

Clovis does too.

Neither falls.

The crowd erupts.

And for the first time tonight...

Clovis' expression changes.

Not a smile.

Never a smile.

But something close to approval.

Valkyrie rolls her neck.

Steps forward.

Clovis does the same.

JOHN PHILLIPS: This started with hesitation.

MARK BRAVO: That's gone.

Valkyrie throws another forearm.

Clovis answers.

MARK BRAVO: Now they're fighting.

At ringside...

Marie Van Claudio watches.

And slowly...

her arms unfold.

Valkyrie and Clovis collide again.

Forearm.

Forearm.

Forearm.

Neither gives an inch.

Valkyrie finally changes levels and drives a knee hard into Clovis' ribs.

Another knee.

She grabs the wrist—

SHORT-ARM LARIAT!

Clovis staggers!

But stays standing.

Valkyrie pulls him back—

ANOTHER SHORT-ARM LARIAT!

Clovis drops to one knee.

The crowd reacts.

Valkyrie immediately grabs him around the waist.

She plants her feet.

DEADLIFT GERMAN SUPLEX!

Clovis crashes across his shoulders!

Valkyrie rolls through and gets back to her feet.

She doesn't celebrate.

She doesn't taunt.

She simply turns...

And looks toward Trey.

Trey nods.

TREY MACK: Yeah.

He grips the tag rope.

TREY MACK: She's strong.

Valkyrie's eyes narrow.

Trey nods again.

TREY MACK: I know.

Valkyrie turns back toward Clovis.

Clovis is already getting up.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Valkyrie Knox may be one of the few competitors on this roster who can match Clovis Black physically.

MARK BRAVO: Former strong-woman competitor against a human freight train. Neither one of them is interested in finding reverse.

Valkyrie charges.

CORNER BODY AVALANCHE!

Clovis absorbs the impact!

Valkyrie backs up.

Charges again—

Clovis explodes out!

BIG BOOT!

Valkyrie crashes backward!

Clovis grabs her immediately.

OVERHEAD BELLY-TO-BELLY!

Valkyrie flies!

She lands hard.

Clovis doesn't cover.

Instead, he turns toward Trey.

Trey extends his hand.

TAG!

Trey comes in at speed.

Valkyrie reaches one knee—

Trey hits the opposite ropes.

SPRINTS back across—

SPINNING BACK ELBOW!

Valkyrie goes down!

Trey keeps moving!

Off the ropes again!

ROLLING SENTON!

BOOM!

Trey hooks the leg!

ONE!

TWO!

Valkyrie kicks out!

Trey immediately gets up.

He grabs Valkyrie.

Pulls her toward the corner.

Clovis reaches.

TAG!

Trey whips Valkyrie into the ropes.

She rebounds—

Trey scoops her up!

POP-UP—

Clovis comes charging from the side!

BODY BLOCK!

Trey completes the POWERSLAM!

THUUUUD!

The crowd erupts!

JOHN PHILLIPS: THERE IT IS!

MARK BRAVO: THAT is why you don't overlook Mack and Black as a team!

Clovis covers!

ONE!

TWO!

AMY BREAKS IT UP!

Amy dives onto Clovis.

She fires a forearm across his head.

Then another.

Trey steps through the ropes.

Amy immediately retreats.

The referee gets between them.

AMY HARRISON: Back to your corner!

Trey looks incredulous.

TREY MACK: You were just in here!

Amy smiles.

AMY HARRISON: And now I'm not.

Trey shakes his head.

The referee orders him back.

Trey reluctantly returns to the apron.

Behind the referee—

Amy grabs Valkyrie's hand!

She pulls.

Valkyrie slides across the canvas toward the corner.

TAG!

Amy immediately enters.

Clovis turns—

YAKUZA KICK!

Clovis staggers into the ropes!

Amy grabs his arm.

SPRINGBOARD—

CODE BOSTON!

The tornado single-arm DDT spikes Clovis!

Amy hangs onto the arm!

She transitions!

FUJIWARA ARMBAR!

Clovis grimaces.

Amy wrenches back.

AMY HARRISON: COME ON!

Clovis doesn't answer.

He begins dragging himself toward the ropes.

Amy cranks harder.

AMY HARRISON: TAP!

Clovis keeps crawling.

Trey slaps the turnbuckle.

TREY MACK: Come on, Clovis!

Clovis reaches.

Almost...

Amy pulls backward!

Clovis stops.

Trey reaches as far over the ropes as he can.

TREY MACK: Right here!

Clovis looks toward him.

Then plants his free hand.

Pushes himself up.

Amy's eyes widen.

Clovis rises to one knee.

Then both feet.

Amy is STILL hanging from the arm.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Look at the strength of Clovis Black!

Clovis reaches down.

Grabs Amy around the waist.

DEADLIFT!

GERMAN SUPLEX!

Amy releases on impact!

Both are down!

The crowd starts building.
Clovis rolls onto his stomach.
Amy crawls toward Valkyrie.
Clovis crawls toward Trey.
Marie walks closer to Amy and Valkyrie's corner.
MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: Amy!
Amy reaches.
Clovis reaches.
Valkyrie stretches out.
Trey does the same.
Amy dives—
TAG!
Valkyrie enters!
Clovis lunges—
TAG!
TREY MACK EXPLODES INTO THE RING!
Valkyrie charges!
Trey ducks the lariat!
Hits the ropes!
Valkyrie turns—
RUNNING CROSSBODY!
Both crash down!
Trey pops back up!
The crowd erupts!
Valkyrie rises—
BELLY-TO-BELLY SUPLEX!
Trey throws her across the ring!
Amy enters—
Trey sees her!
SPINNING BACK ELBOW!
Amy tumbles through the ropes!
Trey turns back toward Valkyrie.
She has reached the corner.

Trey sees it.

His eyes widen.

He takes off.

CORNER SPLASH!

Valkyrie gets crushed against the turnbuckles!

Trey backs away.

He looks around the building.

For the first time tonight...

the grin appears.

Just a little one.

He starts bouncing.

TREY MACK: MACK—

He charges!

CANNONBALL!

BOOOOOOM!

The building ERUPTS!

JOHN PHILLIPS: MACK ATTACK!

Trey grabs Valkyrie by the legs.

Drags her out of the corner.

He reaches down.

Hooks her.

Starts hauling her upward—

MARK BRAVO: MACK TRUCK!

But Amy jumps onto the apron!

The referee turns toward her!

Trey drops Valkyrie.

He points at Amy.

TREY MACK: GET OUT!

Amy screams back at him.

AMY HARRISON: MAKE ME!

Trey starts toward her.

Clovis shouts from the corner.

CLOVIS BLACK: Trey.

That's all.

Trey stops.

Looks at Clovis.

Clovis points behind him.

Trey turns—

VALKYRIE CHARGES!

Trey sidesteps!

Valkyrie nearly collides with Amy!

She stops herself!

Amy drops from the apron.

Valkyrie turns—

TREY POPS HER UP!

POWERSLAM!

He covers!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

VALKYRIE GETS A SHOULDER UP!

Trey sits up.

Breathing hard.

He looks toward Clovis.

Clovis extends his hand.

Trey nods.

He starts dragging Valkyrie toward their corner.

And that's when Marie begins shouting.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: VALKYRIE!

Trey stops.

He looks toward Marie.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: GET UP!

Valkyrie tries.

Trey looks at Marie.

Then toward Clovis.

Then back at Marie.

TREY MACK: Seriously?

Marie looks directly at him.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: What?

TREY MACK: You're coaching them?

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: I'm supporting The Empire.

Trey looks around.

At himself.

At Clovis.

Then back at Marie.

TREY MACK: What the hell are we?

The crowd reacts.

Marie takes a step closer.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: Right now?

A pause.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: You're the two people who walked out on me.

Trey's expression changes.

Clovis' eyes lock onto Marie.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Oh boy.

MARK BRAVO: There it is.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Marie Van Claudio hasn't forgotten last week.

MARK BRAVO: Forget? John, she hasn't even moved past it.

Trey walks toward the ropes.

TREY MACK: You told me I wasn't pulling my weight!

Marie doesn't back down.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: And then you proved me right!

Trey laughs.

Not because it's funny.

Because he can't believe what he's hearing.

TREY MACK: I spent how long trying to keep this thing together?

Marie starts to respond.

TREY MACK: Nah.

He holds up a finger.

TREY MACK: Nah, you listen now.

The crowd grows louder.

TREY MACK: Amy wants your spot? I said Empire.

Amy looks offended from ringside.

TREY MACK: You and Amy wanna tear each other apart? I said Empire.

Trey points toward Clovis.

TREY MACK: You start dragging HIM because you're pissed off at ME?

Clovis steps closer to the ropes.

TREY MACK: I STILL said Empire.

Marie stares at him.

TREY MACK: All the way Empire.

A beat.

TREY MACK: Remember?

For just a second...

Marie has no response.

Then—

VALKYRIE GRABS TREY FROM BEHIND!

GERMAN SUPLEX!

Trey crashes across the canvas!

JOHN PHILLIPS: Trey took his eye off the match!

MARK BRAVO: Because he's arguing with the supposed leader of his own faction!

Valkyrie gets up.

Trey rolls toward the ropes.

Marie immediately shouts.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: NOW!

Valkyrie charges!

RUNNING BIG BOOT!

Trey crashes through the ropes and spills to the floor!

Right in front of Marie.

Marie looks down at him.

Trey looks up.

Marie doesn't offer a hand.

She simply stares.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: Maybe worry about the match.

Trey slowly pushes himself up.
His face hardens.
TREY MACK: Yeah.
He pulls himself onto the apron.
TREY MACK: Maybe I should.
Trey steps back inside.
Valkyrie meets him immediately.
Forearm!
Trey answers!
Valkyrie!
Trey!
Valkyrie fires a knee!
Trey doubles over!
Valkyrie pulls him in—
VALKNUT DRIVER!
Trey is PLANTED!
Valkyrie hooks the leg!
ONE!
TWO!
CLOVIS BREAKS IT UP!
Clovis crashes down across Valkyrie's back!
Amy immediately enters!
She leaps onto Clovis!
Forearms!
Clovis grabs her around the waist—
Amy fires elbows!
Valkyrie rises!
Trey rises!
The referee has lost control!
Amy and Clovis spill toward one side of the ring!
Valkyrie and Trey begin throwing bombs on the other!
The crowd is roaring!
JOHN PHILLIPS: This thing is breaking down!

MARK BRAVO: You're talking about the match, right?

JOHN PHILLIPS: I'm not sure anymore!

Amy rakes Clovis across the eyes!

Clovis staggers!

Amy charges—

CLOVIS CATCHES HER!

He lifts!

Amy kicks!

Clovis loses his grip!

Amy lands behind him!

She runs—

CLOVIS TURNS!

WHAM!

RUNNING BODY BLOCK!

Amy is turned inside out!

The referee forces Clovis toward his corner.

On the opposite side—

Valkyrie grabs Trey.

GORILLA-PRESS!

Trey slips down behind her!

Valkyrie turns—

SPINNING BACK ELBOW!

Valkyrie staggers!

Trey hits the ropes!

He accelerates!

RUNNING CROSSBODY!

Valkyrie goes down!

Trey doesn't cover.

He immediately crawls toward Clovis.

Clovis reaches.

TAG!

Clovis enters.

Valkyrie gets up—

CORNER AVALANCHE FROM CLOVIS!

Valkyrie is crushed!

Clovis backs away.

Trey is already moving along the apron.

Clovis looks at him.

They know.

No words.

Clovis pulls Valkyrie from the corner.

SHORT-ARM—

THE WHISTLE!

The lariat nearly turns Valkyrie inside out!

Clovis doesn't cover.

He pulls Valkyrie upward.

Trey extends his hand.

TAG!

Clovis sends Valkyrie into the corner.

Trey enters.

Clovis charges first—

CORNER AVALANCHE!

Valkyrie stumbles forward.

Trey hits the opposite ropes!

Full speed!

CANNONBALL!

Valkyrie crumples!

Trey immediately drags her away from the ropes.

He reaches down.

Hooks her around the waist.

JOHN PHILLIPS: He's got her!

Trey muscles Valkyrie up!

MARK BRAVO: MACK TRUCK!

Amy enters!

Clovis intercepts!

Amy stops dead.

Clovis stands between her and Trey.

Amy looks up at him.

Clovis shakes his head.

Once.

Behind him—

Trey has Valkyrie positioned!

Marie sees it.

Her eyes widen.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: VALKYRIE!

Trey looks toward Marie.

Just for a fraction of a second.

Marie climbs onto the apron.

JOHN PHILLIPS: What is Marie doing?!

The referee immediately turns.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: GET DOWN!

The referee orders Marie off the apron.

Trey releases Valkyrie.

He stares at Marie.

TREY MACK: Are you serious right now?!

Marie points at him.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: You wanted to prove something?! PROVE IT!

Trey looks absolutely stunned.

TREY MACK: I WAS!

Marie shouts back.

Clovis turns his head.

Looks at Marie.

Looks at Trey.

Amy sees the opening.

She grabs Clovis from behind and pulls him throat-first across the top rope!

Clovis falls through to the floor!

JOHN PHILLIPS: AMY HARRISON!

Trey turns at the sound—

VALKYRIE GRABS HIM!

Trey fights!
Elbow!
Elbow!
Valkyrie loses the grip!
Trey spins—
FOREARM!
Valkyrie answers!
Trey fires another!
Valkyrie another!
Trey backs her into the ropes!
He whips—
Reversal!
Trey hits the ropes!
Comes flying back—
Valkyrie catches him!
GORILLA-PRESS!
Trey is elevated high above the ring!
He slips free!
Lands behind!
Valkyrie turns!
Trey kicks the stomach!
He hooks her!
He lifts!
But Valkyrie fights down!
Back body drop!
Trey lands hard!
Valkyrie falls toward her corner.
Amy reaches.
TAG!
Amy comes in.
Trey is getting up.
Amy waits.
Her eyes locked on him.

She smiles.

AMY HARRISON: Come on, Trey.

She motions for him to rise.

AMY HARRISON: Pull your weight.

Trey looks up.

The crowd reacts.

Something changes.

Trey gets to his feet.

Amy runs—

SPINNING FACEBUSTER!

TREY COUNTERS!

He throws Amy off!

Amy lands on her feet!

Turns—

SMACK!

Trey blasts her with a forearm!

Amy staggers.

Trey hits the ropes.

He comes back like a truck!

RUNNING CROSSBODY!

Amy is flattened!

Trey rolls through.

He gets back up.

He looks toward Marie.

Marie looks back.

Trey points down at Amy.

TREY MACK: I'm done proving shit.

The crowd reacts.

Trey turns away from Marie.

He looks toward his corner.

Clovis has climbed back onto the apron.

Trey extends his hand.

Clovis extends his.

TAG!

Clovis enters.

And from this moment forward...

neither man looks at Marie.

MARK BRAVO: There it is.

JOHN PHILLIPS: What?

MARK BRAVO: They stopped wrestling for Marie Van Claudio.

Clovis grabs Amy.

Hauls her upright.

Amy throws a forearm.

Clovis absorbs it.

Another.

Nothing.

Clovis grabs her wrist.

Violent pull—

SHORT-ARM LARIAT!

THE WHISTLE!

Amy collapses!

Clovis stands over her.

Trey grips the tag rope behind him.

Valkyrie begins pulling herself upright on the opposite apron.

Marie watches from ringside.

For the first time tonight...

she doesn't look angry.

She looks concerned.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Amy Harrison may be in serious trouble!

MARK BRAVO: And Marie Van Claudio may finally be realizing something.

JOHN PHILLIPS: What's that?

MARK BRAVO: She wanted Trey Mack and Clovis Black to prove what they bring to The Empire.

Clovis reaches down and drags Amy up.

MARK BRAVO: She may not like the answer.

Clovis reaches down and drags Amy Harrison back to her feet.

Amy is barely steady.

Clovis grabs her wrist.
He looks toward Trey.
Trey is already there.
Hand extended.
TAG!
Trey steps through the ropes.
Clovis whips Amy toward him.
Trey catches her—
POPS HER UP!
Amy goes airborne!
Clovis charges!
RUNNING BODY BLOCK!
Trey catches Amy on the way down—
POWERSLAM!
BOOOOOOM!
The building erupts!
Trey hooks both legs!
ONE!
TWO!
VALKYRIE BREAKS IT UP!
Valkyrie crashes down across Trey!
Clovis immediately enters.
Valkyrie gets up—
Clovis charges!
Valkyrie sidesteps!
Clovis hits the ropes!
Valkyrie grabs him from behind!
She hooks the waist!
GERMAN SUPLEX!
Clovis lands hard!
But Valkyrie doesn't see Trey coming.
Trey launches himself—
RUNNING CROSSBODY!

Valkyrie and Trey spill through the ropes together!

Both crash to the floor!

JOHN PHILLIPS: Bodies everywhere!

MARK BRAVO: Whatever hesitation existed when that bell rang is LONG gone!

Inside the ring, Amy is still down.

Outside...

Trey begins pulling himself up using the barricade.

Valkyrie reaches the apron.

Clovis rolls underneath the bottom rope and returns to his corner.

The referee begins restoring order.

Marie Van Claudio watches.

Her attention isn't on Amy.

It isn't on Valkyrie.

It's on Trey.

Trey feels it.

He looks toward her.

For half a second...

their eyes meet.

Then Trey turns away.

No argument.

No explanation.

He slides back into the ring.

MARK BRAVO: Notice that.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Trey didn't say a word to Marie.

MARK BRAVO: That's what I'd be worried about.

Amy is rising.

Trey approaches.

Amy suddenly catches him!

JAWBREAKER!

Trey staggers!

Amy grabs his arm—

CODE BOSTON!

SPRINGBOARD TORNADO SINGLE-ARM DDT!

Trey is planted!

Amy hangs onto the arm!

She rolls through!

FUJIWARA ARMBAR!

Trey immediately grimaces!

JOHN PHILLIPS: Amy has the arm!

MARK BRAVO: And Trey is nowhere near Clovis!

Amy pulls back.

Trey reaches toward the ropes.

Too far.

Amy cranks harder.

AMY HARRISON: TAP!

Trey shakes his head.

AMY HARRISON: COME ON!

She pulls again.

AMY HARRISON: QUIT!

Trey's face tightens.

He looks toward his corner.

Clovis has his arm extended.

Trey begins dragging himself.

Inch by inch.

Amy realizes where he's going.

She adjusts.

Pulls him backward.

Trey plants his free hand.

Pushes.

Another foot.

Clovis reaches.

Trey reaches.

Their fingers almost touch—

Amy drags Trey away!

Trey pounds the canvas.

Amy smiles.

AMY HARRISON: Where's your team now?

Trey looks up at her.

Then toward Clovis.

Clovis steps through the ropes.

The referee immediately blocks him.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Clovis wants in!

MARK BRAVO: And Amy knows exactly what she's doing.

With the referee distracted—

Valkyrie enters!

She drives a boot down across Trey's shoulder!

Amy releases!

Valkyrie stomps again!

Clovis sees it.

His eyes narrow.

Marie sees it.

She says nothing.

Valkyrie returns to her corner before the referee turns.

Amy pulls Trey up.

She drags him toward her corner.

TAG!

Valkyrie enters.

Amy holds Trey.

Valkyrie drives a knee into his ribs!

Trey folds.

Valkyrie hooks him.

SUPLEX!

Trey crashes down.

Valkyrie covers.

ONE!

TWO!

TREY KICKS OUT!

Valkyrie sits up.

She looks toward Marie.

Marie points toward Trey.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: Finish it.

Valkyrie rises.

Trey slowly follows.

She grabs him.

Trey fires an elbow.

Valkyrie absorbs it.

Another.

She loses her grip.

Trey turns—

Valkyrie grabs him again!

Trey fights!

Elbow!

Elbow!

Elbow!

Valkyrie stumbles!

Trey collapses toward his corner!

Clovis reaches!

Valkyrie grabs Trey's ankle!

Trey hops on one foot.

He looks back.

ENZIGURI!

Valkyrie releases!

Trey falls forward—

TAG!

CLOVIS BLACK ENTERS!

The crowd erupts!

Valkyrie gets up—

BIG BOOT!

She goes down!

Amy enters!

Clovis turns—

BELL CLAP!

Amy staggers backward!

Clovis grabs her!

OVERHEAD BELLY-TO-BELLY!

Amy goes flying!

Valkyrie rises!

Clovis turns!

Valkyrie swings!

Clovis ducks!

DEADLIFT GERMAN SUPLEX!

Valkyrie crashes!

Clovis rises.

The crowd is on its feet.

MARK BRAVO: Clovis Black is running through everything in front of him!

Amy charges from behind!

Clovis turns—

CORNER AVALANCHE!

Amy is crushed!

Clovis backs away.

Amy stumbles forward.

He grabs her wrist.

YANKS her toward him—

THE WHISTLE!

SHORT-ARM LARIAT!

Amy flips inside out!

Clovis looks toward Trey.

Trey is still favoring the arm.

But he's standing.

He extends his hand.

Clovis looks at it.

Then tags.

TAG!

Trey enters.

Amy is barely moving.

Clovis pulls her up.

Trey takes position.

Marie sees it.

She recognizes what's coming.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: AMY!

Clovis whips Amy toward Trey—

TREY POPS HER UP!

Clovis charges!

Amy is suspended—

VALKYRIE SPEARS CLOVIS!

The collision sends both of them tumbling through the ropes!

Amy drops behind Trey!

Trey turns—

YAKUZA KICK!

Trey staggers!

Amy grabs him!

SPINNING FACEBUSTER!

Trey is planted!

Amy scrambles toward him.

Hooks the leg!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

TREY KICKS OUT!

The crowd erupts!

Amy sits up.

Her eyes are wide.

JOHN PHILLIPS: TREY MACK SURVIVES!

Amy looks toward Marie.

Marie shouts at her.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: AGAIN!

Amy nods.

She pulls Trey up.

AMY HARRISON: LONG LIVE THE EMPIRE!

Amy runs—

BROKEN UGLY FACE—

TREY CATCHES THE LEG!

Amy hops on one foot!

Trey shoves her backward!

Amy hits the ropes!

Rebounds!

Trey catches her!

BELLY-TO-BELLY SUPLEX!

Amy flies across the ring!

Trey falls to one knee.

Both competitors are exhausted.

On the floor...

Valkyrie and Clovis are beginning to rise.

Marie looks between them.

Then toward Amy.

Amy crawls.

Trey gets up.

Amy reaches toward Valkyrie's corner.

But Valkyrie isn't there.

She's still on the floor.

Trey sees it.

He looks toward Clovis.

Clovis reaches the apron.

Hand extended.

Trey starts toward him.

Marie suddenly climbs onto the apron.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Marie again!

The referee immediately turns.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: HEY!

Trey stops.

He looks at Marie.

Marie points toward him.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: You wanted this!

Trey stares at her.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: You wanted to prove you didn't need us!

Trey's face twists in disbelief.

TREY MACK: WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!

Marie continues shouting.

The referee orders her down.

Clovis watches from the apron.

His expression darkens.

Amy crawls behind Trey.

She reaches up—

ROLL-UP!

The referee turns!

ONE!

TWO!

TREY KICKS OUT!

Amy is sent forward.

Trey rolls backward.

Both scramble up.

Amy charges—

Trey sidesteps!

Amy collides with the turnbuckles!

Trey turns.

Clovis reaches.

Trey looks at Marie.

Marie is still on the floor yelling.

Then Trey looks at Clovis.

He makes his choice.

TAG!

Clovis enters.

Amy stumbles out of the corner.

Clovis grabs her wrist.

Violent jerk—

THE WHISTLE!

Amy collapses!

Clovis pulls her back up.

He positions her.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Clovis may be looking to finish this!

Valkyrie climbs onto the apron!

She starts through the ropes—

TREY LAUNCHES HIMSELF!

RUNNING CROSSBODY!

Trey wipes Valkyrie off the apron!

Both crash to the floor!

Inside—

Clovis gets Amy up!

FREIGHT LINE!

Amy is DESTROYED!

Clovis covers!

Marie rushes toward the apron!

ONE!

Marie grabs the bottom rope.

TWO!

She starts to climb—

But Trey is there.

On the floor.

Between Marie and the ring.

Marie stops.

Trey looks at her.

He doesn't touch her.

Doesn't threaten her.

He simply stands there.

THREE!

DING! DING! DING!

The Mid-America Center erupts!

Clovis immediately releases the cover.

He gets to his feet.

No celebration.

No smile.

Just business.

JOHN PHILLIPS: MACK AND BLACK WIN IT!

MARK BRAVO: There you go, Marie! They pulled their weight!

On the floor...

Trey hasn't moved.

Marie stares at him.

Neither speaks.

Behind Trey, Valkyrie sits against the barricade, recovering.

Inside the ring, Amy rolls onto her side.

Clovis looks toward Trey.

Then Marie.

Then back toward Trey.

Trey finally turns away from Marie.

He slides into the ring.

The referee raises Clovis' hand.

Trey walks over.

The referee reaches for his wrist as well.

Trey allows it.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Trey Mack and Clovis Black just beat Amy Harrison and Valkyrie Knox.

MARK BRAVO: And they did it while Marie Van Claudio spent half the match trying to make sure they didn't!

Marie enters the ring.

The referee immediately releases both winners and moves away.

Trey sees her.

Clovis sees her.

Amy is sitting in the corner now.

Valkyrie climbs back onto the apron.

Marie walks toward Trey.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: Happy?

Trey blinks.

TREY MACK: What?

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: You proved your point.

Trey looks at Clovis.

Then back at Marie.

TREY MACK: You think that's what this was?

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: Isn't it?

Trey shakes his head.

TREY MACK: No.

Amy pulls herself up using the ropes.

AMY HARRISON: Oh, spare us.

Trey turns toward her.

AMY HARRISON: You've been waiting all week for this.

TREY MACK: For what?

AMY HARRISON: To embarrass her.

Trey looks at Marie.

Then Amy.

He laughs once.

TREY MACK: You guys really don't get it.

Marie steps closer.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: Then explain it.

Trey looks at her.

For several seconds.

Then he points toward Amy.

TREY MACK: She tried to beat me.

He points toward Valkyrie.

TREY MACK: She tried to beat me.

Then Trey points at Marie.

TREY MACK: You wanted me to lose.

The crowd reacts.

Marie immediately shakes her head.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: I wanted you to understand there are consequences—

TREY MACK: There!

Trey throws both hands outward.

TREY MACK: THAT!

Marie stops.

TREY MACK: Listen to yourself!

He points around the ring.

TREY MACK: We're supposed to be a team!

TREY MACK: We're supposed to have each other's backs!

TREY MACK: We're supposed to win together!

Trey looks at Marie.

TREY MACK: But this ain't about The Empire anymore.

Amy starts forward.

AMY HARRISON: Watch yourself.

Clovis steps between them.

Amy stops.

Clovis doesn't say anything.

He doesn't need to.

Trey continues.

TREY MACK: Every damn thing is about who's loyal enough to Marie.

Marie steps around Clovis.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: I am The Empire.

Silence.

Trey just looks at her.

Clovis slowly turns his head.

Amy's expression changes.

Even Valkyrie looks toward Marie.

Marie realizes what she said.

But she doesn't take it back.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: I built this.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: I held this together.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: And I will not let anybody undermine me because they don't like being told when they've failed!

Trey nods slowly.

TREY MACK: Okay.

That's it.

Just...

Okay.

Marie seems almost more bothered by that than if Trey had screamed back.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: That's all you have to say?

Trey looks at her.

TREY MACK: What else is there?

He motions toward Marie.

TREY MACK: You just said it.

Marie says nothing.

Trey turns toward Clovis.

TREY MACK: Come on.

Clovis nods.

They start toward the ropes.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: Don't you dare walk away from me again.

Trey stops.

The crowd reacts.

Clovis stops beside him.

Trey looks down.

Then slowly turns around.

TREY MACK: See?

Marie stares at him.

TREY MACK: That's your problem.

Trey takes one step back toward her.

TREY MACK: You keep thinking I'm walking away from you.

A beat.

TREY MACK: Maybe you should start asking why.

Silence.

Trey turns.

He steps through the ropes.

Clovis starts to follow.

Marie calls after him.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: Clovis.

Clovis stops.

Trey reaches the floor.

He looks back.

Marie stares at Clovis.

MARIE VAN CLAUDIO: You don't have to follow him.

Clovis looks at Marie.

Then Amy.

Then Valkyrie.

Then down at Trey.

Clovis turns back toward Marie.

CLOVIS BLACK: I know.

A beat.

CLOVIS BLACK: I'm not.

Marie looks confused.

Clovis steps through the ropes.

He drops to the floor beside Trey.

Then looks back at Marie.

CLOVIS BLACK: We're leaving together.

Clovis turns away.

Trey looks at him.

Clovis starts up the ramp.

Trey follows.

The crowd reacts strongly.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Wow.

Marie stands motionless inside the ring.

Amy moves beside her.

Valkyrie steps through the ropes and joins them.

Three members of The Empire remain in the ring.

Trey and Clovis reach the stage.

Trey stops.

He turns around.

For a moment, it looks like he might say something.

Maybe shout the words he's repeated again and again.

All the way Empire.

But he doesn't.

Trey simply looks at the three women in the ring.

Then at Clovis.

Clovis nods toward the curtain.

Trey nods back.

They disappear backstage together.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Are Trey Mack and Clovis Black still members of The Empire?

MARK BRAVO: Technically? Nobody said they weren't.

Marie continues staring toward the entrance.

MARK BRAVO: But look at that ring, John.

Amy Harrison.

Valkyrie Knox.

Marie Van Claudio.

And nobody else.

MARK BRAVO: You tell me.

Amy says something quietly to Marie.

Marie doesn't respond.

Her eyes remain fixed on the entrance.

Valkyrie looks toward Marie.

Then toward Amy.

Then back toward the empty aisle.

JOHN PHILLIPS: Marie wanted to find out whether Trey Mack and Clovis Black still belonged in The Empire.

MARK BRAVO: I think she asked the wrong question.

JOHN PHILLIPS: What's the right one?

MARK BRAVO: Whether The Empire still gives them a reason to.

The camera holds on Marie Van Claudio.

Angry.

Embarrassed.

And perhaps, underneath all of it...

realizing that for the first time since this began, Trey Mack isn't trying to hold The Empire together anymore.

[FADE]

Eight Days

Segment

We return from the aftermath of Mack & Black's victory over Amy Harrison and Valkyrie Knox. The camera remains on Mark Bravo and John Phillips at ringside as the crowd continues buzzing.

John Phillips: I don't know what we just witnessed, Mark. Trey Mack and Clovis Black didn't walk out of The Empire tonight... but whatever that group was when they walked into this building, it certainly doesn't feel the same anymore.

Mark Bravo: Marie Van Claudio wanted them to prove their value. They did. The problem is Marie may have learned something she wasn't prepared to learn.

Phillips starts to respond—

The arena lights dim.

The UTA video screen flickers.

BLACK.

Then—

MADMAN SZALINSKI: UNPLANNED SPOT!

The crowd immediately laughs as footage rolls of Madman's Revolutionary War-era musket unexpectedly discharging into Chris Ross. Smoke fills the hallway.

Cut.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: Anytime, anywhere... THE MADNESS CAN STRIKE TOO!

Cut.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: TAG!

Madman points at Ross.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: You're it, champ!

Madman drops the musket and RUNS.

Cut.

Madman creeping through another backstage hallway. Musket in hand. Exaggerated tiptoeing.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: Be vewy, vewy quiet...

Cut.

Madman searching locker rooms.

Cut.

Madman behind the wheel of his car.

His eyes suddenly finding CHRIS ROSS sitting in the back seat.

Madman nearly jumps out of his skin.

Cut.

Ross casually climbing out of the vehicle.

CHRIS ROSS: Ta ta for now, Madman!

Cut.

MADMAN SZALINSKI: HOW THE HELL DID YOU EVEN GET IN HERE?!

Cut to black.

Silence.

Then we hear it.

That unmistakable Reaper laugh.

Low.

Amused.

The picture fades back in.

Chris Ross sits alone in a darkened room.

Nothing elaborate. Concrete wall. Folding chair. A television sitting on a production case in front of him.

The UTA Championship rests across Ross' lap.

On the television, Madman is still running down the hallway.

Ross watches.

He chuckles.

Chris Ross: You know what's funny, Madman?

Ross continues watching the screen.

Chris Ross: I actually like this shit.

Another clip.

The musket.

Chris Ross: The fucking musket.

Madman tiptoeing.

Chris Ross: Running around hallways.

Madman peering around a corner.

Chris Ross: Hunting the Reaper.

Ross smirks.

Chris Ross: You hiding from me.

The car footage.

Chris Ross: Me hiding from you.

Ross laughs again.

Chris Ross: It's been fun.

He reaches forward.

CLICK.

The television goes black.

Ross' smile disappears with it.

He looks directly into the camera.

Chris Ross: But you've got eight days.

Silence.

Chris Ross: Eight days until there's no hallway to run down.

Chris Ross: No car to drive away in.

Chris Ross: No Scott Stevens to annoy until somebody finally gives you what you want.

Ross looks down at the UTA Championship.

His hand slowly runs across the faceplate.

Chris Ross: And you did get what you wanted.

He looks back into the camera.

Chris Ross: You wanted this.

Ross taps the championship.

Chris Ross: You wanted your shot.

Beat.

Chris Ross: But more than anything...

Ross leans forward.

Chris Ross: ...you wanted me.

That tiny Reaper smile returns.

Chris Ross: And that's the part I've been trying to get through your fucking head.

Ross rises from the chair.

He picks up the UTA Championship and places it over his shoulder.

Chris Ross: You spent all this time hunting me because you thought getting Chris Ross angry was gonna make Chris Ross vulnerable.

Ross shakes his head.

Chris Ross: Wrong.

A beat.

Chris Ross: All you did was make me interested.

Ross takes one slow step toward the camera.

Chris Ross: And now?

Another.

Chris Ross: Now you've got my full fucking attention.

Ross is close enough now that the championship is only partially visible over his shoulder.

Chris Ross: So enjoy the jokes while they're still funny.

Silence.

Chris Ross: Enjoy telling everybody how The Madness can strike anytime...

Chris Ross: ...anywhere...

Ross' eyes narrow.

Chris Ross: ...because you stole that shit from me in the first place.

A brief grin.

Chris Ross: Cute.

Gone again.

Chris Ross: But next Saturday, Madman...

Ross adjusts the championship.

Chris Ross: ...I don't give a fuck about three seconds.

Beat.

Chris Ross: I don't care if I pin you.

Chris Ross: I don't care if you pin me.

Chris Ross: Because a three count doesn't mean shit to me.

Ross steps even closer.

Chris Ross: What matters...

Pause.

Chris Ross: ...is which one of us walks out on his own two feet.

Ross stares directly through the lens.

Chris Ross: And which one goes home in a fucking ambulance.

Silence.

Ross backs away.

Chris Ross: You wanted your shot.

The Reaper grin slowly returns.

Chris Ross: You got it.

Ross turns to leave.

He stops.

Without looking back—

Chris Ross: Now survive it.

BLACK.

A heartbeat.

Then the Ring King graphic crashes onto the screen.

RING KING 2026

SEPTEMBER 26 — LOS ANGELES

UTA CHAMPIONSHIP

CHRIS ROSS (c)

vs.

MADMAN SZALINSKI

The graphic fades and we return to the Mid-America Center.

John Phillips: Madman Szalinski wanted Chris Ross. Eight days from now in Los Angeles, he's going to get him.

Mark Bravo: And that's what worries me, John. Somewhere along the way this stopped being about whether Madman could get another shot at the UTA Championship. He got the shot. Mission accomplished.

John Phillips: But now he has to survive the champion.

Mark Bravo: Madman spent weeks hunting the Reaper. Chris Ross spent those same weeks studying the man hunting him. At Ring King, we find out which one of them understood the other better.

The broadcast transitions to a graphic displaying what remains tonight.

STILL TO COME TONIGHT

RING KING SEMIFINAL

SOL AZTECA vs. MIKEY UNLIKELY

RING KING SEMIFINAL

KIRSTY MCKINNEY vs. MIKE BEST

MAIN EVENT

BOBBY DEAN & YOSHII vs. ERIC DANE JR. & HAKURYU

John Phillips: And we are getting closer. Before this night is over, sixteen will have become two. We will know exactly who will meet next Saturday in Los Angeles to become the 2026 Ring King.

Mark Bravo: And we're about to determine the first of those two finalists.

John Phillips: Sol Azteca faces Mikey Unlikely, but before she makes her way to the ring, we've got cameras standing by backstage.

Cut backstage.

Handle Your Business

Segment

The broadcast cuts backstage.

For once, there is no interview setup.

No microphone.

No reporter.

No one asking Sol Azteca what tonight means.

There is only Sol.

She sits on a folding chair in a quiet corner near the gorilla position, already dressed for competition. Her white-and-gold mask is on. One boot rests on the edge of a road case as she pulls the laces tight.

A monitor mounted on the wall beside her shows the Ring King bracket.

Sixteen names reduced to four.

One semifinal highlighted:

SOL AZTECA

vs.

MIKEY UNLIKELY

Sol finishes tying the boot.

She plants her foot on the floor.

Checks the athletic tape around her wrist.

Tightens it.

Then checks it again.

Footsteps approach from somewhere off camera.

Sol hears them.

She doesn't look up.

The footsteps stop.

Still, Sol doesn't look.

Finally, a familiar Southern voice breaks the silence.

Emily Hightower: "That's it?"

Sol's hands stop.

Slowly, she looks up.

Emily Hightower stands several feet away.

The UTA Women's Championship rests over one shoulder.

The UTA Hardcore Championship rests over the other.

Months ago, the sight of Emily Hightower carrying those championships would have immediately brought Sol to her feet.

Tonight?

Sol looks at Emily.

Then goes right back to adjusting her wrist tape.

Sol Azteca: "I have a match."

Emily raises an eyebrow.

Emily Hightower: "I noticed."

Emily steps farther into the room.

Sol finishes with the tape and rolls her wrist.

Emily glances toward the monitor.

Mikey Unlikely's name sits directly across from Sol's.

Emily Hightower: "Big one."

Sol Azteca: "Yes."

Emily Hightower: "One win."

Sol Azteca: "Yes."

Emily waits.

Sol reaches for her other wrist.

Nothing.

Emily looks almost amused now.

Emily Hightower: "You ain't gonna ask?"

That finally gets Sol's attention.

Sol Azteca: "Ask what?"

Emily gives her a look.

Then taps the faceplate of the UTA Women's Championship.

Sol's eyes move toward it.

There was a time when that championship represented everything unfinished between them.

A promised fight.

A match that never happened.

Months of anger.

Sol looks at it for several seconds.

Then back at Emily.

Sol Azteca: "No."

Emily's expression changes slightly.

Not anger.

Surprise.

Emily Hightower: "No?"

Sol stands.

Not confrontationally.

Simply because she's finished getting ready.

Sol Azteca: "I know what happened between us."

Emily's expression hardens just enough.

Sol Azteca: "You know what happened between us."

Sol glances at the championship again.

Sol Azteca: "I have not forgotten."

Emily adjusts the title on her shoulder.

Emily Hightower: "Didn't figure you had."

Sol Azteca: "But tonight..."

Sol turns toward the monitor.

Her finger points toward Mikey Unlikely.

Sol Azteca: "...you are not my opponent."

A beat.

Sol Azteca: "He is."

Emily studies her.

Then slowly nods.

Emily Hightower: "Good."

Sol looks back at her.

Emily Hightower: "That's what I came to see."

Sol tilts her head slightly.

Emily Hightower: "Funny thing."

Emily steps alongside Sol, looking up at the bracket with her.

Emily Hightower: "You spent all that time comin' after me."

She glances toward Sol.

Emily Hightower: "Demandin' I finish what we started."

Emily Hightower: "Demandin' another fight."

Emily Hightower: "Demandin' I give you what you thought I owed you."

Sol immediately turns toward her.

Sol Azteca: "I did not stop because you were right."

Emily looks at her.

A moment passes.

Then Emily gives the slightest shrug.

Emily Hightower: "Didn't say I was."

That catches Sol off guard.

Only slightly.

But enough.

Emily looks back toward the bracket.

Emily Hightower: "You stopped chasin' me."

Her eyes travel through the names Sol has already defeated.

Emily Hightower: "Started wrestlin'."

Then to the remaining four.

Emily Hightower: "And now you're one win away from Los Angeles."

Sol looks at the bracket.

Sol Azteca: "One win away from the final."

Emily Hightower: "Or one loss away from being done."

Sol turns toward her.

Emily doesn't soften it.

Emily Hightower: "That's what tonight is."

Sol nods.

Sol Azteca: "I know."

Emily Hightower: "Good."

Emily motions toward Mikey's name.

Emily Hightower: "Because Mikey Unlikely ain't Bianca Page."

Emily taps the Hardcore Championship this time.

Emily Hightower: "And he damn sure ain't me."

She looks at Sol.

Emily Hightower: "That man's been doin' this long enough to know about a hundred different ways to steal three seconds from somebody."

Sol's eyes remain on Mikey's name.

Emily Hightower: "You can outfight him."

Emily Hightower: "You can outwrestle him."

Emily Hightower: "You can beat his ass from one side of that ring to the other."

Emily pauses.

Emily Hightower: "And he'll still be lookin' for three seconds."

Sol finally turns toward her.

Sol Azteca: "Then I don't give him three seconds."

Emily stares at her.

And for the first time...

She smiles.

Not mockingly.

Not cruelly.

Just a small grin.

Emily Hightower: "There she is."

The two women stand silently for another moment.

Months of history remain between them.

None of it has disappeared.

But neither woman seems interested in reopening it tonight.

Emily turns to leave.

Sol Azteca: "Emily."

Emily stops.

She doesn't turn around immediately.

When she finally does, Sol's eyes aren't on Emily.

They're on the UTA Women's Championship.

Sol Azteca: "I still remember."

Emily looks down at the championship.

Emily Hightower: "Figured you did."

Sol Azteca: "Winning tonight does not change what happened."

Emily Hightower: "Didn't figure it would."

Sol raises her eyes.

Sol Azteca: "Losing tonight does not change it either."

Emily looks at Sol for a long moment.

Then she nods.

Once.

Emily Hightower: "Fair enough."

Emily looks down at the Hardcore Championship.

Emily Hightower: "I've got Bianca next Saturday."

Then she glances toward the monitor.

Emily Hightower: "You've got Mikey tonight."

Emily starts walking again.

Emily Hightower: "Handle your business."

Sol turns toward the monitor.

Sol Azteca: "You handle yours."

Emily makes it several steps.

Then stops.

She doesn't turn around.

Emily Hightower: "Sol."

Sol looks over.

Emily Hightower: "Don't let him find three seconds."

Emily walks away.

Sol watches her disappear around the corner.

Then slowly turns back toward the monitor.

The camera pushes in.

SOL AZTECA

vs.

MIKEY UNLIKELY

Sol stares at Mikey's name.

She reaches down.

Tightens the tape around her wrist one final time.

And heads toward gorilla.

The broadcast cuts back to ringside.

John Phillips: "There is a whole lot of history between Emily Hightower and Sol Azteca that did not suddenly disappear tonight."

Mark Bravo: "No, but something has changed. For months Sol Azteca wanted Emily Hightower's attention more than anything in the world. Tonight Emily walked into that room carrying the Women's Championship... and Sol barely looked at it."

John Phillips: "Because right now there is only one thing that matters."

The semifinal graphic fills the screen.

SOL AZTECA vs. MIKEY UNLIKELY

RING KING SEMIFINAL

Mark Bravo: "Three seconds. That's what Mikey Unlikely has been finding throughout this tournament. He doesn't have to dominate Sol Azteca. He doesn't have to break her. He only has to find three seconds."

John Phillips: "And Sol Azteca says she isn't giving them to him."

Mark Bravo: "We're about to find out."

Sol Azteca vs. Mikey Unlikely

Match

The Ring King bracket fills the screen.

Sixteen names.

Twelve have been eliminated.

Four remain.

Tonight, the first finalist will be decided.

SOL AZTECA

vs.

MIKEY UNLIKELY

John Phillips: Sixteen competitors began this tournament. We are down to four. And right now, one of these two competitors is about to punch their ticket to Los Angeles and the Ring King final.

Mark Bravo: And I keep thinking about what Emily Hightower just told Sol Azteca. Mikey Unlikely doesn't need to dominate you. He doesn't need to embarrass you. He needs three seconds.

John Phillips: Sol's answer was pretty simple.

Mark Bravo: Don't give him three.

The lights shift.

? "Gasolina (Instrumental)" – Daddy Yankee ?

The crowd comes alive.

Sol Azteca bursts through the curtain already moving with the rhythm, pointing toward the crowd and clapping along as she steps onto the stage.

The energy from earlier is still there.

But it doesn't last long.

Sol looks toward the ring.

The smile fades.

Focus.

She starts down the ramp, slapping a few hands along the way before accelerating toward ringside.

Sol slides beneath the bottom rope and springs directly to the turnbuckle in one fluid motion, throwing her arms wide as the crowd responds.

John Phillips: Twenty-one years old. Born into lucha libre in Mexico, refined through the Sendai Girls dojo in Japan, and now Sol Azteca is one victory away from competing for Ring King.

Mark Bravo: And look at her, John. This isn't the woman who spent months worrying about what Emily Hightower was doing. She knows exactly what is standing between her and Los Angeles.

Sol drops from the ropes.

Her shoulders settle.

Her feet begin shifting beneath her.

Ready.

Then—

? "Blunt Blowin" by Lil Wayne ?

Another roar.

Mikey Unlikely emerges onto the stage with the WrestleZone Championship over his shoulder.

Mikey stops.

Looks around Council Bluffs.

Then down toward Sol.

A grin.

He taps the championship.

Mark Bravo: And then there's this guy.

John Phillips: Mikey Unlikely has spent this entire tournament reminding everybody that this isn't a nostalgia tour. He's the reigning WrestleZone Champion, he's already eliminated the UTA Champion Chris Ross and Fighting Champion Samuel Scythe from this tournament, and tonight he wants another name.

Mark Bravo: And neither one of those matches looked the same. That's what makes Mikey dangerous. He's been doing this long enough that he doesn't need the match to go according to plan.

Mikey walks down the ramp, considerably more relaxed than Sol.

He reaches ringside and looks up at her.

Sol continues moving lightly from foot to foot.

Mikey points at her feet.

Then jokingly starts bouncing from one foot to the other himself.

Sol doesn't react.

Mikey stops.

Shrugs.

He climbs into the ring.

Mikey hands the WrestleZone Championship outside before turning toward Sol.

For the first time, his grin disappears too.

The two meet near the center.

Sol Azteca.

Mikey Unlikely.

The winner advances to Ring King.

The bell rings.

DING! DING! DING!

Neither moves immediately.

Sol shifts her feet.

Mikey watches.

She circles left.

Mikey follows.

Sol changes direction.

Mikey follows again.

They finally lock up.

Mikey immediately uses the size advantage to push Sol backward.

Sol pivots.

Mikey finds himself moving past her.

Sol catches the wrist.

Arm wringer.

Mikey rolls through.

Reverses.

Sol cartwheels through the pressure and twists free.

Mikey reaches for her again—

Sol ducks beneath.

Runs toward the ropes.

Springboards—

ARM DRAG!

Mikey rolls across the ring.

Pops up.

Sol is already waiting.

Mikey looks at her.

Nods once.

Mark Bravo: There's the first lesson. Mikey's bigger. Sol doesn't care. She's not going to stand there and see who can shove harder.

Mikey approaches again.

Sol keeps circling.

Mikey tries to cut her off.

Sol changes direction.

Mikey changes with her.

Sol feints toward the ropes—

Mikey doesn't bite.

Sol stops.

Mikey smiles.

Mikey Unlikely: Been here before.

Sol gives him a small nod.

Sol Azteca: So have I.

Mikey chuckles.

They lock up again.

Mikey grabs a side headlock.

Sol pushes him toward the ropes.

Mikey holds on.

Sol tries again.

Mikey plants himself.

Sol changes tactics.

Drops lower.

Hooks Mikey's leg.

Takes him down.

Mikey immediately rolls away before Sol can establish control.

Both rise.

Mikey points at Sol.

Mikey Unlikely: Okay.

Sol moves forward.

Mikey suddenly shoots low.

Sol sprawls.

Mikey comes back up.

Sol spins behind.

Waistlock.

Mikey elbows backward.

Sol releases before contact.

Mikey turns—

SMACK!

Running dropkick catches Mikey square in the chest!

Mikey tumbles through the ropes to the floor.

Sol doesn't follow.

She backs toward the center instead.

John Phillips: And that's the discipline we've seen from Sol throughout this tournament. She could have launched herself out there.

Mark Bravo: Why? Mikey's the one who needs to get back in the ring. Make the veteran spend the energy.

Mikey sits on the floor.

Looks up at Sol.

She gestures toward the ring.

Mikey smirks.

Mikey Unlikely: Smart kid.

He slides back inside.

Sol immediately closes distance.

Mikey tries to catch her—

Sol redirects.

Spinning back elbow!

Mikey staggers.

Snapmare!

Sol hits the ropes—

RUNNING KICK!

Cover!

ONE!

TWO!

Mikey kicks out.

Sol is already moving as Mikey sits up.

Basement dropkick to the knee!

Mikey rolls onto his side clutching the leg.

Mark Bravo: There it is. Take the leg. Mikey can't find those three seconds if he can't get into position to take them.

Sol grabs the ankle.

Mikey immediately scoots backward.

Sol follows.

Mikey kicks her away with his free leg.

Sol rolls backward and lands on her feet.

Mikey gets up—

Sol charges.

Mikey sidesteps!

Sol catches herself against the turnbuckles.

Mikey rushes in.

Sol slips through the ropes.

Mikey hits the corner chest-first.

Sol springs to the top rope—

Mikey turns—

SOLAR FLARE!

SPRINGBOARD CORKSCREW CROSSBODY!

Sol hooks both legs!

ONE!

TWO!

Mikey kicks out!

John Phillips: Sol Azteca is dictating this match right now!

Mark Bravo: She's making Mikey react to her. That's exactly where she wants him.

Sol rises.

Mikey rolls toward the ropes.

Sol approaches—

Mikey grabs the middle rope.

The referee forces separation.

Sol backs away immediately.

Mikey uses the ropes to stand.

He rubs the knee Sol targeted.

Sol watches.

Mikey notices her watching.

He puts more weight on the leg.

Tests it.

Then suddenly charges.

Sol reacts—

TOO LATE!

Mikey barrels into her and drives Sol backward into the corner!

Shoulder to the midsection!

Another!

Mikey pulls her out.

Short clothesline!

Sol hits hard.

Mikey covers.

ONE!

TWO!

Sol kicks out.

Mikey doesn't complain.

He grabs Sol and immediately pulls her back up.

Whip into the ropes.

Sol rebounds.

Mikey catches her around the waist—

Sol rotates in midair!

Lands behind him!

Mikey turns—

CRACK!

SKYFIRE KICK!

Running spinning heel kick catches Mikey across the jaw!

Mikey collapses.

Sol covers!

ONE!

TWO!

TH—

SHOULDER UP!

The crowd reacts.

Sol sits beside Mikey.

Breathes.

Once.

Twice.

Then gets back to her feet.

John Phillips: No frustration. No wasted movement.

Mark Bravo: That's what makes her dangerous. A lot of young wrestlers get a two-count like that and start wondering what went wrong. Sol's already wondering what comes next.

Mikey crawls toward the corner.

Sol stalks him without rushing.

Mikey gets one knee underneath himself.

Sol takes off.

Handspring—

Mikey moves!

Sol adjusts in mid-motion and lands rather than throwing the enziguri blind.

Mikey expected the kick.

Sol expected him to expect it.

They stare at one another.

Mark Bravo: Oh, now we're getting somewhere.

Mikey grins.

Sol's eyes narrow.

Mikey comes forward.

Sol fires a kick into the thigh.

Another.

Mikey answers with a forearm.

Sol absorbs it and shifts her footing.

Kick to the leg.

Mikey forearm.

Sol kick.

Mikey forearm.

Sol changes level—

Basement dropkick to the knee!

Mikey drops to one knee.

Sol hits the ropes—

Mikey rolls underneath the incoming strike!

Sol continues through.

Rebounds—

Mikey catches her!

He redirects her momentum and sends Sol shoulder-first into the turnbuckles!

Sol drops to a knee.

Mikey grabs her immediately.

Neckbreaker!

Cover!

ONE!

TWO!

Sol kicks out!

Mikey rolls onto his back.

He looks toward the ceiling.

Then sideways at Sol.

She's already rolling onto her stomach.

Mikey exhales.

Mikey Unlikely: Of course.

Mikey gets up first.
Sol reaches the ropes.
Mikey pulls her away.
Sol twists free.
Kick to Mikey's leg.
Mikey stumbles.
Sol hits another.
Mikey swings.
Sol ducks.
Spinning back elbow!
Mikey staggers into the ropes.
Sol runs—
Mikey launches her over the top!
Sol catches the rope.
Lands on the apron.
Mikey turns.
Sol springboards—
Mikey steps backward.
Sol realizes it mid-flight.
She lands on her feet instead of committing.
Mikey immediately sweeps the leg!
Sol crashes onto her back.
Mark Bravo: THERE! That's experience!
John Phillips: Mikey didn't counter the springboard. He convinced Sol not to use it!
Mark Bravo: And the second she changed plans, he was waiting for the landing!
Mikey drops down.
Cover!
ONE!
TWO!
Sol kicks out!
Mikey sits up.
Now he looks frustrated.
Only briefly.

Because when he looks back—

Sol is moving again.

Slowly.

But moving.

John Phillips: She is still there.

Mark Bravo: That's Sol Azteca. You don't get rid of her. You have to keep solving her.

Mikey pulls Sol upright.

Forearm.

Sol stumbles.

Mikey grabs her.

Sol blocks.

Mikey tries again.

Sol drops her weight.

Elbow to the ribs.

Another.

Sol breaks free.

Kick to the thigh!

Kick to the ribs!

Mikey swings wildly.

Sol ducks.

Handspring—

AZTECA RUSH!

ENZIGURI CONNECTS!

Mikey drops!

Sol collapses beside him.

The crowd rises.

John Phillips: BOTH ARE DOWN!

Sol turns onto her stomach.

Crawls.

Mikey rolls away instinctively.

Sol reaches him.

Hooks the leg!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

MIKEY KICKS OUT!

Sol releases immediately.

She sits upright.

The crowd thought that was it.

Sol did not.

She looks at Mikey.

Then toward the ropes.

Decision made.

Sol rises.

Mikey is on one knee.

Sol hits the ropes.

Springboards—

CORONA STRIKE!

THE SPRINGBOARD KNEE CONNECTS!

Mikey's head snaps backward!

He collapses flat onto the mat!

John Phillips: CORONA STRIKE! SOL HAS HIM!

Sol doesn't cover.

She knows what comes next.

She moves into position.

Mikey is barely moving.

Sol reaches for him—

Mark Bravo: SUNFALL! SHE'S LOOKING FOR SUNFALL!

Sol begins the setup—

Mikey suddenly twists!

He rolls through!

Sol is pulled forward!

Mikey stacks her!

ONE!

TWO!

TH—

SOL ESCAPES!

Both scramble up!

Sol swings—

Mikey ducks.

Mikey grabs her from behind!

Sol immediately fights the hands.

Mikey can't hold her.

Sol spins free.

Kick to the knee!

Mikey drops.

Sol takes two steps backward.

Mikey looks up.

Sol charges—

SKYFIRE KICK—

MIKEY DUCKS!

Sol spins through and catches herself.

Mikey comes from behind—

Sol feels him coming.

Drops down.

Mikey goes over her.

Sol springs back up.

Mikey turns.

Sol leaps—

Mikey catches her!

Sol twists!

Mikey loses the grip!

Sol lands behind him!

Waistlock!

Mikey grabs her wrist.

Turns underneath.

Sol counters.

Mikey counters the counter.

Sol rolls through.

Mikey follows.
Both back up.
Sol fires a kick.
Mikey catches it!
Sol jumps—
ENZIGURI!
Mikey ducks underneath!
Sol lands on her hands and knee.
Immediately begins pushing herself back upright.
Mikey sees it.
For one fraction of a second—
Sol's back is exposed.
Mikey dives.
He hooks her around the waist.
Sol reaches for the ropes—
Mikey rolls her backward!
Sol rolls through with him!
Mikey keeps turning!
Sol tries to shift her shoulder!
Mikey changes his grip!
STACKS HER DEEP!
ONE!
Sol kicks her legs!
TWO!
Sol twists!
Mikey shifts with her!
THREE!
DING! DING! DING!
Sol kicks free—
One instant too late.
Mikey releases and rolls away.
Sol shoots upright.
Her eyes immediately find the referee.

Three fingers.

It's over.

Sol looks toward Mikey.

Mikey is lying on his back, chest heaving.

Then he starts laughing.

Not at Sol.

Almost in disbelief.

John Phillips: THREE SECONDS!

Mark Bravo: Emily Hightower told her! She told Sol exactly what Mikey Unlikely was going to look for!

John Phillips: And Sol knew it! She knew it all night!

Mark Bravo: Knowing and stopping are two different things! Sol Azteca didn't choke. She didn't panic. She didn't make some ridiculous mistake. Mikey Unlikely just found a window that was open for maybe half a heartbeat!

Mikey sits up.

The referee raises his arm.

Mikey looks toward the Ring King logo above the entrance.

His expression changes.

The grin remains.

But there's something underneath it now.

Relief.

Mikey gets to his feet.

The WrestleZone Championship is handed back to him.

He raises it.

Ring Announcer: Here is your winner... and advancing to the FINAL of the 2026 Ring King Tournament... MIKEY... UNLIKELY!

The bracket appears on the video wall.

RING KING FINALIST

MIKEY UNLIKELY

Mikey looks up at it.

Slowly nods.

John Phillips: Mikey Unlikely came back to UTA saying this wasn't nostalgia. Saying this wasn't a reunion tour. Saying he came back to win.

Mark Bravo: Well, he's one match away from backing up every damn word.

Across the ring, Sol remains seated against the bottom turnbuckle.

She's disappointed.

There is no hiding that.

She stares at the mat for several seconds.

Then exhales.

Mikey notices her.

His celebration stops.

He looks at the WrestleZone Championship.

Then back at Sol.

Mikey walks toward her.

Sol looks up.

Mikey extends his hand.

Sol looks at it.

Then takes it.

Mikey pulls her to her feet.

For a moment, neither says anything.

Then Mikey leans closer.

Mikey Unlikely: She was right.

Sol's eyes narrow slightly.

Mikey raises three fingers.

Mikey Unlikely: That's all I needed.

Sol looks at the three fingers.

Then back at Mikey.

Sol Azteca: You found them.

Mikey nods.

Mikey Unlikely: Barely.

That lands differently.

Mikey lowers his hand.

Mikey Unlikely: Don't forget that part.

Sol studies him.

Then gives a single nod.

Mikey turns away.

He climbs the nearest turnbuckle and raises the WrestleZone Championship as the crowd applauds.

Sol remains in the ring behind him.

Disappointed.

But standing.

John Phillips: Sol Azteca's Ring King tournament is over.

Mark Bravo: Yeah. And that's gonna hurt. It should hurt. She was one match away from Los Angeles.

John Phillips: But there was no Emily Hightower. No Bianca Page. No interference. No excuse.

Mark Bravo: And no shame, either. Mikey Unlikely had to wrestle damn near perfectly in the closing seconds to keep Sol's shoulders down. That's what this tournament is supposed to be.

Sol steps through the ropes.

She starts up the ramp.

Halfway up, Sol stops.

She turns back.

Mikey is still celebrating in the ring.

Sol looks toward the giant Ring King bracket.

Her name has gone dark.

Mikey Unlikely's has advanced.

Sol stares at it for another moment.

Then nods to herself.

She turns and walks through the curtain.

John Phillips: And now there is one.

The bracket fills the screen.

2026 RING KING FINAL

MIKEY UNLIKELY

vs.

???

Mark Bravo: Mikey Unlikely is going to Los Angeles. Later tonight, either Kirsty McKinney or Mike Best joins him.

John Phillips: And next Saturday, one of those two names will become the 2026 Ring King.

The First Finalist

Segment

The broadcast cuts backstage where Katy Winters stands beside the curtain leading away from the arena.

She doesn't have to wait long.

Mikey Unlikely comes through.

The WrestleZone Championship is over his shoulder. His hair is wet with sweat. His chest is still heaving. There is none of the relaxed swagger from his entrance anymore.

He looks like someone who just went through hell.

He also looks very, very pleased with himself.

Katy Winters: Mikey!

Mikey stops.

He looks at Katy.

Then at the microphone.

Mikey Unlikely: I'm gonna need you to give me, like... eight seconds.

Katy Winters: Eight?

Mikey Unlikely: Maybe twelve.

Mikey bends over, hands on his knees, trying to catch his breath.

Mikey Unlikely: That girl does not stop.

Katy smiles.

Katy Winters: You told her yourself in the ring. You barely found those three seconds.

Mikey stands upright.

Mikey Unlikely: Barely still counts.

He points back toward the arena.

Mikey Unlikely: That's the thing about this tournament, Katy. Nobody's giving out extra credit.

Mikey Unlikely: You don't get bonus points because you dominated somebody. You don't get an extra star next to your name because it looked pretty.

He holds up three fingers.

Mikey Unlikely: Three seconds.

Then lowers them.

Mikey Unlikely: That's all I needed.

Katy Winters: And because you found them, you're officially the first finalist in the 2026 Ring King Tournament.

The grin returns.

Mikey Unlikely: Yeah, I am.

Katy Winters: Which means later tonight you're going to find out who joins you in Los Angeles. Kirsty McKinney or Mike Best.

Mikey nods.

Katy Winters: Preference?

Mikey considers the question.

Mikey Unlikely: Nope.

Katy Winters: None?

Mikey Unlikely: Why should I have one?

He adjusts the WrestleZone Championship.

Mikey Unlikely: Chris Ross was supposed to be the problem.

Mikey Unlikely: Samuel Scythe was supposed to be the problem.

He glances back toward the curtain.

Mikey Unlikely: Sol Azteca damn near became a problem.

A small nod of respect.

Mikey Unlikely: And now they're all out.

Katy Winters: Chris Ross might argue that one.

Mikey Unlikely: He can.

Mikey shrugs.

Mikey Unlikely: Doesn't change the bracket.

He points toward the camera.

Mikey Unlikely: That's what everybody keeps missing.

Mikey Unlikely: They keep wanting to put an asterisk somewhere.

Mikey Unlikely: Ross got attacked.

Mikey Unlikely: Scythe had Ace Andrews running around.

Mikey Unlikely: Sol was this close.

Mikey holds his thumb and index finger barely apart.

Mikey Unlikely: Cool.

He widens the grin.

Mikey Unlikely: I'm still here.

Katy Winters: So you'll be watching McKinney and Best?

Mikey Unlikely: Oh, absolutely.

Mikey starts walking backward.

Mikey Unlikely: Kirsty. Mike.

He points toward his eyes.

Mikey Unlikely: Take your time.

Mikey Unlikely: Beat the hell out of each other.

Mikey Unlikely: I'll be watching.

He turns away.

Katy calls after him.

Katy Winters: Mikey! One more question!

Mikey continues walking.

Mikey Unlikely: Used all twelve seconds, Katy!

He disappears around the corner.

Katy shakes her head with a smile as the broadcast transitions.

Now We're Even

Segment

Elsewhere backstage...

Emily Hightower has found herself a table.

That normally wouldn't be noteworthy.

What's on the table is.

A trash can.

A length of chain.

A kendo stick.

A steel chair.

A roll of duct tape.

And, for reasons known only to Emily Hightower, a large metal baking sheet.

The UTA Women's Championship rests nearby.

The Hardcore Championship is around Emily's waist.

Emily picks up the baking sheet.

Looks at it.

Smacks it against her palm.

CLANG!

Emily Hightower: Huh.

She puts it into the trash can.

Bianca Page: Seriously?

Emily stops.

Bianca Page stands several feet away.

Ace Andrews is beside her.

Emily looks at Bianca.

Then at Ace.

Then back at Bianca.

Emily Hightower: What?

Bianca points at the collection.

Bianca Page: What the hell is this?

Emily Hightower: Shopping.

Bianca Page: That's not shopping.

Emily Hightower: Sure it is.

Emily picks up the chain.

Emily Hightower: Just ain't decided what I'm buyin' yet.

Ace peers into the trash can.

Ace Andrews: Is that a baking sheet?

Emily Hightower: Yep.

Ace Andrews: Why?

Emily looks at him like the answer should be obvious.

Emily Hightower: Makes a funny noise.

Ace slowly nods.

Ace Andrews: That's actually fair.

Bianca looks at him.

Bianca Page: Ace.

Ace Andrews: I'm just saying, acoustically—

Bianca Page: Ace.

He raises his hands.

Ace Andrews: Done.

Bianca turns back toward Emily.

Bianca Page: You think this is funny.

Emily's expression changes.

Not dramatically.

But enough.

Emily Hightower: Nope.

Bianca Page: You knew exactly what I meant when I asked for a championship match.

Emily Hightower: Yep.

Bianca Page: I wanted that.

Bianca points toward the Women's Championship.

Emily looks at it.

Emily Hightower: Yep.

Bianca Page: Instead you decided to be clever.

Bianca points toward the Hardcore Championship around Emily's waist.

Bianca Page: You gave me that.

Emily Hightower: Yep.

Bianca's jaw tightens.

Bianca Page: You wanna say anything besides yep?

Emily thinks about it.

Emily Hightower: Nope.

Ace has to turn his head to hide a grin.

Bianca notices.

Bianca Page: Do not.

Ace immediately straightens.

Ace Andrews: Wasn't.

Bianca steps closer to Emily.

Bianca Page: Here's what you don't understand.

Bianca Page: I was pissed off when you pulled that little switch.

Bianca Page: I thought you were making a joke out of me.

Bianca Page: Thought you were hiding the championship I actually wanted behind one I didn't.

Emily says nothing.

Bianca Page: Then I thought about it.

Bianca steps closer.

Bianca Page: And I realized something.

Bianca Page: Taking your Hardcore Championship first?

A smile begins forming.

Bianca Page: I can live with that.

Emily finally smiles back.

Emily Hightower: There she is.

Bianca's smile disappears.

Bianca Page: Don't patronize me.

Emily Hightower: I ain't.

Emily steps closer.

Emily Hightower: That's what I was waitin' for.

Bianca looks confused.

Emily Hightower: You came askin' me for a championship match like you were ordering somethin' off a menu.

Emily taps the Women's Championship.

Emily Hightower: You wanted this one.

Then the Hardcore Championship.

Emily Hightower: I gave you this one.

Emily Hightower: And you looked at me like I'd insulted you.

Emily takes the Hardcore Championship from around her waist.

She holds it between them.

Emily Hightower: This ain't the consolation prize.

Bianca looks at the championship.

Emily Hightower: And if you're gonna fight me for it, I need to know you understand that.

Bianca looks back at Emily.

Bianca Page: I understand.

A beat.

Bianca Page: Next Saturday I'm taking it.

Emily grins.

Emily Hightower: Good.

Bianca wasn't expecting that.

Emily Hightower: That's what I wanted to hear.

Emily puts the Hardcore Championship back over her shoulder.

Bianca Page: And after that...

Her eyes move toward the Women's Championship.

Bianca Page: I'm coming back for the one I actually asked for.

Emily follows her eyes.

Then looks back at Bianca.

Emily Hightower: Survive the first one.

The smile leaves Bianca's face.

Bianca Page: You keep saying things like that because you think I don't know what a Hardcore match is.

Emily Hightower: Nah.

Emily reaches into the trash can.

She pulls the baking sheet back out.

Emily Hightower: I keep sayin' it because I know exactly what one is.

Emily suddenly SMASHES the baking sheet over the edge of the table.

CLAAAAANG!

Ace jumps.

Ace Andrews: Jesus!

Emily looks at the bent baking sheet.

Then at Bianca.

Emily Hightower: See?

She holds it up.

Emily Hightower: Funny noise.

Bianca doesn't laugh.

Emily does.

Bianca slowly backs away.

Bianca Page: Eight days.

Emily Hightower: I'll bring the groceries.

Bianca turns and walks away.

Ace starts following her.

Then stops.

He looks at Emily.

Looks at the baking sheet.

Ace Andrews: For the record...

Emily waits.

Ace Andrews: It does make a funny noise.

Bianca Page: ACE!

Ace hurries after her.

Emily watches them leave.

She looks down at the dented baking sheet.

CLANG.

She hits it once more against the table.

Emily Hightower: He gets it.

Eight Days Away

Segment

The Ring King logo fills the screen.

John Phillips: We are just eight days away from Ring King, live from the Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles, California!

Mark Bravo: And after what we just saw, somebody might want to warn the hardware stores in Los Angeles that Emily Hightower is coming.

John Phillips: Earlier tonight we heard from UTA Champion Chris Ross. He will defend against the man who has spent weeks hunting the Reaper, Madman Szalinski.

The graphic appears.

UTA CHAMPIONSHIP

Chris Ross (c) vs. Madman Szalinski

The next graphic.

INTERNATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Bobby Dean (c) vs. Eric Dane Jr.

John Phillips: Eric Dane Jr. cashes in his guaranteed championship opportunity against Bobby Dean, but those two don't even have to wait until Los Angeles to get their hands on each other. They'll be on opposite sides of tonight's main event.

The graphic changes.

UNITED STATES CHAMPIONSHIP

Hakuryu (c) vs. Yoshii

Mark Bravo: Hakuryu and Yoshii finally get the rematch Yoshii has been asking for, and supposedly this time we're going to find out who the better man is without Sinja or Jed Eye deciding it for them.

The Hardcore Championship graphic follows.

HARDCORE CHAMPIONSHIP

Emily Hightower (c) vs. Bianca Page

John Phillips: Bianca Page asked Emily Hightower for a championship match. She got one. Just not the championship she expected.

Mark Bravo: She doesn't look disappointed anymore.

John Phillips: And then there is Ring King itself.

The tournament bracket appears.

One side is now complete.

MIKEY UNLIKELY

The opposite side remains blank.

WINNER OF KIRSTY McKINNEY vs. MIKE BEST

John Phillips: Mikey Unlikely has already secured his place in the final.

Mark Bravo: And he's sitting somewhere in this building right now waiting to see whether he's getting Kirsty McKinney or Mike Best.

John Phillips: We won't have to wait much longer.

One Strike

Segment

The scene changes backstage.

Hakuryu stands alone for a moment.

The United States Championship rests around his waist.

He is already dressed for tonight's main event.

Quiet.

Focused.

Sinja steps into frame behind him.

Hakuryu doesn't turn.

Hakuryu: Jed Eye will be there tonight.

Sinja: I know.

Hakuryu: Yoshii will be there.

Sinja: I know.

Hakuryu finally turns.

Hakuryu: And you will do nothing.

Sinja's expression tightens.

Sinja: Nothing?

Hakuryu: Nothing.

A beat.

Hakuryu: You stand outside.

Hakuryu: You watch.

Hakuryu: You learn.

Hakuryu: You do not touch Jed Eye.

Sinja looks away for a moment.

Sinja: He interferes—

Hakuryu: Nothing.

Sinja looks back at him.

Hakuryu: Yoshii touches you?

Sinja: Nothing.

Hakuryu: Jed insults you?

Sinja's jaw tightens.

Sinja: Nothing.

Hakuryu steps closer.

Hakuryu: Good.

Sinja nods.

Sinja: There will be no mistake tonight.

Hakuryu stares at his disciple.

Hakuryu: There cannot be.

Silence.

Hakuryu starts to walk past him.

Sinja speaks.

Sinja: And Los Angeles?

Hakuryu stops.

Sinja: You told me one final opportunity.

Hakuryu slowly turns his head.

Sinja: I have not forgotten.

Hakuryu turns fully toward him.

Hakuryu: Neither have I.

Sinja waits.

Hakuryu: Tonight is not your opportunity.

A beat.

Hakuryu: Tonight you prove you deserve to reach it.

Hakuryu walks away.

Sinja remains behind.

His eyes follow Hakuryu.

Controlled.

For now.

The Other Side of the Bracket

Segment

We return to ringside.

John Phillips: That's an interesting instruction from the United States Champion considering everything that's happened between those four men.

Mark Bravo: Interesting? Hakuryu just put a leash on a pit bull and told him he's not allowed to bite anybody. I'm interested in seeing how long that lasts.

John Phillips: We'll find out in tonight's main event. But right now, we turn our attention back to the tournament.

The Ring King bracket fills the screen once more.

Mikey Unlikely's name is locked into the final.

Two names remain beneath it.

KIRSTY MCKINNEY

MIKE BEST

John Phillips: Kirsty McKinney entered this tournament through the qualifiers. Since then, she has survived Hakuryu and eliminated Maxwell Jett.

Mark Bravo: And now she gets Mike Best.

John Phillips: Mike Best has defeated Valkyrie Knox, International Champion Bobby Dean and Marie Van Claudio on his road to this semifinal.

Mark Bravo: Kirsty has spent this tournament proving that amateur wrestling background of hers isn't some interesting biography note. She can put you down, keep you down and steal your entire night before you realize what's happening.

John Phillips: Mike Best believes this business is measured by results.

Mark Bravo: Then tonight is pretty simple.

The graphic changes.

RING KING SEMIFINAL

KIRSTY McKINNEY

vs.

MIKE BEST

Mark Bravo: One of them gets Mikey Unlikely in Los Angeles.

John Phillips: One of them goes home.

Mark Bravo: Let's find out which is which.

Kirsty McKinney vs. Mike Best

Match

The tournament graphic fades away.

The lights inside the Mid-America Center shift.

For a moment, there is nothing but the growing noise of the crowd.

Then "In Walks Barbarella" by Clutch growls through the arena.

Kirsty McKinney steps through the curtain.

No theatrics.

No playing to the crowd.

No visible appreciation for the fact that she's one victory away from the Ring King final.

She walks onto the stage with the same almost-neutral expression she might wear entering a wrestling room on a Tuesday afternoon.

John Phillips: What a road it has been for Kirsty McKinney. She had to qualify just to enter this tournament. Then Hakuryu. Then Maxwell Jett. Now one more victory sends her to Los Angeles to face Mikey Unlikely.

Mark Bravo: And look at her, John. You'd think somebody just told her she's got fifteen minutes before the gym closes.

John Phillips: That's Kirsty McKinney.

Mark Bravo: That's what makes her terrifying.

Kirsty reaches the lower portion of the ramp and breaks into a jog.

She slides beneath the bottom rope.

Up to her knees.

Then her feet.

A couple of deep squats.

A roll of the shoulders.

She brushes her hair away from her face with an irritated flick.

Ready.

The music fades.

The crowd begins buzzing before Kirsty's opponent even appears.

Then Mike Best's music hits.

The reaction swells.

Mike Best steps onto the stage.

The Hall of Fame ring catches the arena lights as he raises his hand.

He looks toward the ring.

Toward Kirsty.

And nowhere else.

John Phillips: Mike Best has been blunt about what this return is about. He doesn't want nostalgia. He doesn't want anybody congratulating him for still being able to compete. He wants results.

Mark Bravo: Well, here's the result he wants tonight. Get through Kirsty McKinney and he's in the Ring King final.

John Phillips: Valkyrie Knox. Bobby Dean. Marie Van Claudio. Mike Best has beaten every person placed in front of him throughout this tournament.

Mark Bravo: None of them wrestle like Kirsty.

Mike reaches ringside.

He climbs the steps and enters through the ropes.

Kirsty watches him.

Mike looks across at her.

A small grin.

Kirsty responds with absolutely nothing.

Mark Bravo: He tried smiling at her.

John Phillips: I don't think it worked.

Mark Bravo: I'm not convinced Kirsty enjoys smiling.

Mike removes his entrance gear.

The referee checks both competitors.

Mike rolls his neck.

Kirsty drops slightly lower into her stance.

Mike notices.

His grin disappears.

The referee signals.

The bell rings.

DING! DING!

Neither moves immediately.

Mike's hands rise.

Kirsty's already lower.

They begin circling.

John Phillips: This is going to be fascinating.

Mark Bravo: Mike Best can wrestle. Don't let the mouth fool you. Don't let all the knees and elbows fool you. This guy can go on the mat.

John Phillips: But this is where Kirsty McKinney has spent virtually her entire life.

Mike reaches for the collar-and-elbow.

Kirsty isn't there.

LEVEL CHANGE.

She shoots underneath him.

Double leg.

Mike hits the canvas.

Before he can establish guard, Kirsty is already moving.

She traps one ankle.

Steps over the other leg.

Mike turns his hips.

Kirsty follows.

Mike rolls to his stomach.

Bad decision.

Kirsty immediately climbs onto his back.

Waist ride.

Mike plants both palms against the mat and starts pushing himself upward.

Kirsty hooks an ankle.

Mike drops again.

The crowd reacts.

Kirsty looks almost bored.

Mark Bravo: Oh, Mike hates this already.

John Phillips: Kirsty took him down in seconds and now she's making him carry her weight.

Mike reaches backward for Kirsty's head.

She catches the wrist.

Arm ride.

Mike rolls through.

Kirsty rolls with him.

Mike tries sitting out.

Kirsty switches sides.

Mike tries turning inward.

Kirsty front facelock.

Mike posts.

Kirsty spins behind.

Mike finally reaches the ropes.

The referee calls for the break.

Kirsty releases.

Immediately.

But with an exaggerated sigh.

She rises and walks backward.

Mike remains on one knee.

He looks up at her.

Kirsty brushes the hair out of her face.

Mark Bravo: That might've been the most disrespectful legal rope break I've ever seen.

Mike stands.

He nods slowly.

Mike Best: Okay.

Kirsty tilts her head.

Mike gestures for her to come on.

They circle again.

This time Mike doesn't reach high.

Kirsty shoots.

Mike sprawls.

Kirsty changes direction immediately.

She comes around the waist.

Mike catches an arm.

Standing switch.

Now Mike has the rear waistlock.

Kirsty drops her weight.

Mike tries to lift.

Kirsty hooks his leg.

Blocks it.

Switch.

Kirsty takes the waist.

Mike throws an elbow backward.

Kirsty ducks.

Mike spins around.

Front headlock.

Kirsty immediately attacks the hands.

Peels one away.

Turns the wrist.

Mike rolls forward to relieve the pressure.

Kirsty follows him down.

Mike scissors the head.

Kirsty kicks free.

Both scramble upward.

Mike shoots this time.

Kirsty sprawls hard.

Front facelock.

Mike posts.

Kirsty spins.

Mike catches the ankle.

Kirsty rolls.

Mike follows.

Both reach their feet.

Stalemate.

The crowd applauds.

Mike looks at Kirsty.

Kirsty looks back.

Mike gives her a small nod.

Kirsty rolls her eyes.

Mark Bravo: Mike Best just acknowledged her.

John Phillips: Kirsty appears deeply offended by the concept.

Mike laughs.

And that's when Kirsty shoots again.

Mike barely sprawls in time.

But this time Kirsty doesn't finish the takedown.

She comes upward instead.

BELLY-TO-BELLY SUPLEX!

Mike crashes onto the canvas.

Kirsty follows him down.

Immediate cover.

ONE!

Mike turns a shoulder.

Kirsty doesn't even wait for the kickout.

She catches the arm.

Hooks the leg.

STACK!

ONE!

TWO!

Mike rolls through!

Kirsty follows.

Another cradle!

ONE!

TWO!

Mike kicks free!

Mike scrambles toward the ropes.

Kirsty catches him around the waist.

Mike grabs the top rope with both hands.

The referee orders the break.

Kirsty releases.

Another sigh.

Mike turns around.

Mike Best: You do that every time?

Kirsty McKinney: Do what?

Mike Best: The sigh.

Kirsty thinks.

Kirsty McKinney: Pretty much.

Mike laughs.

Then SLAPS her across the face.

The building reacts.

Kirsty's head snaps sideways.

She remains there for a moment.

Mike's expression changes.

He knows exactly what he just did.

Kirsty slowly turns her head back toward him.

The boredom is gone.

Mark Bravo: Oh.

John Phillips: Mike Best just changed the match.

Kirsty steps forward.

Mike fires a kick into the thigh.

Another.

Kirsty tries to close distance.

Mike drills her with an elbow.

Kirsty stumbles.

Mike follows with a knee into the body.

Knife-edge chop!

Kirsty backs into the ropes.

Mike whips her across.

Kirsty rebounds.

RUNNING SNAP DROPKICK!

Kirsty hits the canvas.

Mike covers.

ONE!

TWO!

Kirsty kicks out.

Mark Bravo: This is where Mike wants it. Kirsty wants a wrestling match. Mike Best just turned it into a fight.

Mike pulls Kirsty upward.

Snap suplex!

Mike floats over.

ONE!

TWO!

Kirsty escapes again.

Mike immediately grabs a side headlock.

He cranks down.

Kirsty plants her feet.

Mike widens his base.

Kirsty tries lifting him.

Mike blocks.

She tries again.

Mike throws a short knee into the body.

Kirsty drops back to one knee.

Mike tightens the headlock.

John Phillips: And now Mike is doing something interesting. He's slowing Kirsty down.

Mark Bravo: More importantly, he's making her wrestle from underneath. Kirsty usually decides where the scramble goes.

Kirsty reaches around Mike's waist.

Locks her hands.

Mike realizes it.

Too late.

Kirsty stands.

BACK-TO-BELLY SUPLEX!

Mike lands hard.

But Kirsty keeps the waist.

Mike tries to rise.

SECOND MAT RETURN!

Still locked.

Mike reaches toward the ropes.

Kirsty drags him backward.

Mike tries turning.

Kirsty rides him down.

She hooks an arm.

Threads a leg.

Mike suddenly realizes he's being folded into something ugly.

Mark Bravo: What the hell is this?

John Phillips: I'm not entirely sure!

Kirsty traps Mike's ankle beneath her thigh while twisting his upper body in the opposite direction.

Mike grimaces.

Kirsty pulls harder.

Still looking mildly irritated.

Mike reaches.

The ropes are several feet away.

He tries rolling.

Kirsty adjusts.

Mike goes the opposite direction.

She adjusts again.

John Phillips: Every time Mike Best tries to create an escape, Kirsty closes it!

Mike stops fighting the hold.

For just a moment.

Kirsty looks down.

That's what Mike wanted.

He suddenly twists hard into the pressure instead of away from it.

Kirsty's balance shifts.

Mike gets one knee beneath himself.

Kirsty grabs the waist.

Mike fires an elbow backward.

It catches her jaw.

Another.

Kirsty releases.

Mike rolls away.

Both rise.

Kirsty charges.

CORKSCREW FOREARM!

Mike gets rocked!

Kirsty catches him.

GUTWRENCH!

She lifts Mike completely off the canvas.

Holds him.

John Phillips: Look at the strength!

Mark Bravo: Two hundred and thirty-five pounds!

K-LIFT!

Mike crashes down!

Kirsty covers!

ONE!

TWO!

Mike gets the shoulder up!

Kirsty doesn't react.

She grabs Mike around the head.

Mike immediately realizes what's coming.

Kirsty begins positioning herself behind him.

John Phillips: Pitty Choke!

Mike grabs her wrist with both hands before she can fully secure it.

Kirsty pulls.

Mike fights.

She drives a knee into his back.

Mike drops forward.

Kirsty snakes the arm deeper.

Mike rolls.

Kirsty follows.

Mike keeps rolling.

Kirsty refuses to release.

They tumble toward the ropes.

Mike hooks the bottom rope with his boot.

The referee calls for the break.

Kirsty holds for a moment.

The referee begins counting.

ONE!

TWO!

Kirsty releases.

She flounces backward with a look of absolute annoyance.

Mark Bravo: There it is again.

John Phillips: Mike survived it.

Mark Bravo: He escaped it. There's a difference.

Mike pulls himself upright using the ropes.

He's breathing harder now.

Kirsty waits.

Mike turns.

Kirsty shoots.

Mike catches her coming in.

KNEE!

Kirsty staggers.

Mike fires another knee into the body.

Then another.

He grabs her.

NORTHERN LIGHTS SUPLEX!

Bridge!

ONE!

TWO!

Kirsty escapes!

Mike rolls through.

He grabs Kirsty around the waist.

BELLY-TO-BACK SUPLEX!

Kirsty lands hard.

Mike doesn't cover.

He drags her back up.

ANOTHER SUPLEX!

This time belly-to-belly.

Kirsty tumbles across the canvas.

Mark Bravo: All the fucking suplexes!

John Phillips: Bravo!

Mark Bravo: That's what he calls them!

Mike stalks toward Kirsty.

She pushes herself up.

HASHTAG MUTED!

NO!

Kirsty ducks beneath the superkick!

Mike spins around.

Kirsty takes the waist.

GERMAN SUPLEX!

Mike folds!

Kirsty maintains the waistlock.

She rolls him back up.

Mike throws an elbow.

Kirsty ducks.

SECOND GERMAN!

Still locked!

Kirsty pulls him up again.

Mike desperately hooks the ropes.

Kirsty yanks.

Mike refuses to let go.

The referee orders Kirsty to break.

She does.

Mike spins around—

HASHTAG MUTED!

The standing superkick catches Kirsty flush!

She drops.

Mike falls into the cover!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

KIRSTY KICKS OUT!

The crowd erupts.

Mike sits upright.

He looks toward the referee.

Two.

Mike nods.

No argument.

John Phillips: Kirsty McKinney survives Hashtag Muted!

Mark Bravo: And look at Mike. No tantrum. No disbelief. He's already thinking about the next thing.

Mike gets to his feet.

Kirsty is on her stomach.

Mike grabs her arm.

Chicken wing.

He begins threading the legs.

John Phillips: Gilded Cage!

Kirsty suddenly comes alive.

She recognizes the danger.

Mike tries sitting into the Muta lock.

Kirsty turns with him.

She slips her trapped arm free at the last possible second.

Mike reaches again.

Kirsty catches his wrist.

Roll-through!

Mike lands on his back.

Kirsty traps the leg.

Her legs snap around him.

Mark Bravo: SHEAR CRADLE!

The crowd explodes!

Mike is folded!

Kirsty cinches tighter.

And there it is.

The look.

She turns her head toward the hard camera.

Bored.

Irritated.

As if pinning Mike Best to advance to the Ring King final is merely another obligation on her schedule.

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

MIKE ESCAPES!

The arena comes unglued.

Kirsty's expression finally changes.

Not shock.

Not panic.

Annoyance.

Deep, personal annoyance.

John Phillips: Mike Best got out of the Shear Cradle!

Mark Bravo: Look at Kirsty!

Kirsty sits up.

Mike rolls toward the ropes.

She stares at him.

Then looks at the referee.

Two.

Kirsty exhales sharply.

Kirsty McKinney: Fine.

She goes after Mike.

Mike is pulling himself upright in the corner.

Kirsty charges.

CORKSCREW FOREARM!

Mike moves!

Kirsty crashes chest-first into the turnbuckles.

Mike grabs her from behind.

GERMAN SUPLEX!

Kirsty lands on her shoulders and rolls through to her knees.

Mike sees it.

Kirsty doesn't.

Mike runs.

John Phillips: HE'S GOT HER!

I KNEED A HERO!

NO!

Kirsty drops flat!

Mike's shining wizard sails over her!

The entire building reacts.

Mark Bravo: SHE SAW IT!

Mike lands awkwardly but stays upright.

He turns—

Kirsty shoots!

Double leg!

Mike goes down!

Kirsty climbs immediately onto his back.

Arm around the neck!

PITTY CHOKE!

John Phillips: SHE HAS IT!

Mike's eyes widen.

Kirsty locks her hands.

Mike reaches for the ropes.

Too far.

Kirsty sprawls her weight across him.

Mike tries getting to his knees.

Kirsty drags him back down.

Mike's face reddens.

Mark Bravo: This is bad!

Mike reaches again.

Nothing.

Kirsty tightens.

Mike's hand rises.

The crowd sees it.

Kirsty sees it.

The referee watches.

Mike's hand hovers.

He doesn't tap.

Instead, Mike drives his knee underneath himself.

Kirsty pulls harder.

Mike gets the other knee beneath him.

He starts standing.

Kirsty remains attached to his back.

John Phillips: How is he doing this?!

Mike gets one foot underneath himself.

Then the other.

Kirsty adjusts the choke.

Mike staggers backward.

He throws himself into the turnbuckles!

Kirsty's back crashes into the corner.

She refuses to release.

Mike does it again!

Still Kirsty hangs on.

Mike reaches backward.

Grabs her head.

SNAPMARES HER OVER!

Kirsty lands seated.

Mike collapses to one knee.

Both are down.

The crowd rises.

Mark Bravo: Mike Best was seconds away from going out!

John Phillips: Kirsty McKinney has dragged a Hall of Famer into deep water!

Kirsty starts getting up.

Mike does the same.

Kirsty reaches him first.

Forearm.

Mike answers.

Kirsty doesn't want this exchange.

She immediately shoots for the waist.

Mike catches her with a knee.

Kirsty stumbles.

Mike elbows her.

Kirsty answers with a short punch.

Mike kicks the thigh.

Kirsty grabs the leg!

Mike hops once.

ENZUIGIRI!

Kirsty drops to a knee.

Mike sees it.

The crowd sees it.

Mike backs into the ropes.

John Phillips: KIRSTY!

Mike charges!

I KNEED A—

KIRSTY CATCHES HIM!

She ducks underneath the knee and catches Mike across her shoulders!

Mark Bravo: WHAT?!

Mike is seated across Kirsty's shoulders.

Kirsty steps forward.

FRONT ELECTRIC CHAIR DROP!

Mike crashes face and chest first into the canvas!

The building explodes.

Kirsty immediately dives onto him.

She grabs for the legs.

She wants the Shear Cradle again.

Mike knows it.

He kicks desperately.

Kirsty catches one leg.

Mike kicks with the other.

Kirsty gets both.

Mike reaches backward and catches her head.

He pulls her forward!

SMALL PACKAGE!

ONE!

TWO!

Kirsty reverses it!

ONE!

TWO!

Mike reverses!

ONE!

TWO!

Kirsty kicks out!

Both scramble.

Kirsty gets behind him.

Waistlock.

Mike switches.

Kirsty switches.

Mike throws an elbow.

Kirsty ducks.

Mike spins.

HASHTAG MUTED!

Kirsty catches the boot!

She sweeps the standing leg!

Mike crashes down!

Kirsty dives forward.

Front facelock.

Mike rolls.

Kirsty follows.

Mike reaches the ropes.

Kirsty drags him away!

John Phillips: She will not let him escape!

Mike turns onto his back.

Kirsty tries to climb over.

Mike drives both boots into her chest!

Kirsty flies backward.

Mike scrambles up.

Kirsty charges.

Mike catches her.

SPINNING SPINEBUSTER!

Mike collapses beside her.

Neither covers.

The crowd begins clapping.

Louder.

Louder.

Mike rolls onto his stomach.

Kirsty does the same.

Both begin crawling upward.

Mark Bravo: This stopped being about proving anything ten minutes ago.

John Phillips: Now it's simply about who gets to Los Angeles.

Mike reaches his feet.

Kirsty reaches hers.

They turn.

Kirsty shoots.

Mike sprawls.

Kirsty switches.

Mike blocks.

Kirsty keeps driving.

Mike clubs her across the back.

Once.

Twice.

Kirsty still drives.

Mike throws a knee.

Kirsty catches it.

Mike hops.

Kirsty lifts.

Mike clubs her again.

Kirsty's grip loosens.

Mike rips himself free.

He grabs Kirsty by the wrist.

Pulls her toward him.

SHORT-ARM LARIAT!

Kirsty flips inside out!

Mike drops to both knees.

Kirsty rolls onto her stomach.

Mike sees her.

She begins pushing herself upward.

One hand.

One knee.

Mike's eyes lock onto her.

He stands.

Kirsty reaches both knees.

Mike runs.

I KNEED A HERO!

FULL CONTACT.

Kirsty collapses.

Mike falls across her.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

DING! DING! DING!

The Mid-America Center erupts.

Mike Best rolls off Kirsty and lies flat on his back.

He doesn't immediately celebrate.

He just breathes.

John Phillips: MIKE BEST IS GOING TO LOS ANGELES!

Mark Bravo: Kirsty McKinney made him earn every damn inch of it!

John Phillips: She nearly pinned him! She nearly choked him unconscious! Twice she found an answer for I KNEED A HERO!

Mark Bravo: But Mike Best only needed her to miss the answer once.

The referee helps Mike to a seated position.

Mike looks across the ring.

Kirsty hasn't moved much.

He looks toward the referee.

Then toward Kirsty again.

The referee raises Mike's arm.

John Phillips: Valkyrie Knox. Bobby Dean. Marie Van Claudio. And now Kirsty McKinney.

Mark Bravo: Results.

Mike hears him announced as the winner.

He closes his eyes.

One nod.

Then he gets to his feet.

The giant screen changes behind him.

The final tournament bracket appears.

Sixteen names have become two.

MIKEY UNLIKELY

MIKE BEST

Mike turns toward the screen.

He stares at Mikey's name.

Then smiles.

John Phillips: The field is set.

Mark Bravo: Mikey Unlikely survived everybody they put in front of him.

John Phillips: So has Mike Best.

Mark Bravo: Eight days from now, one of them runs out of people to survive.

Mike remains in the ring as the Ring King final graphic fills the screen.

2026 RING KING TOURNAMENT FINAL

MIKEY UNLIKELY

vs.

MIKE BEST

Sixteen Became Two

Segment

Mike Best's music continues to pound through the Mid-America Center.

Mike remains in the ring after the victory, sweat pouring from him, breathing heavily as his arm is raised.

Across the ring, Kirsty McKinney is still recovering.

There is no celebration at her expense.

No taunting.

Mike looks toward her.

Then toward the giant screen above the entrance.

The Ring King bracket updates.

Kirsty McKinney's name fades.

Mike Best advances.

2026 RING KING FINAL

MIKEY UNLIKELY

vs.

MIKE BEST

John Phillips: There it is!

Mark Bravo: Sixteen became eight. Eight became four. And four have officially become two.

John Phillips: Mikey Unlikely and Mike Best will meet eight days from tonight at the Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles, and one of those men will become the 2026 Ring King!

Mike stares at the graphic.

MIKEY UNLIKELY.

MIKE BEST.

Mike nods.

Then the crowd changes.

A reaction begins near the entrance.

Mike hears it.

He slowly turns.

Mikey Unlikely steps onto the stage.

The WrestleZone Championship rests over his shoulder.

No microphone.

No jokes.

No exaggerated entrance.

Mikey simply walks to the center of the stage and stops.

Mike Best stands in the center of the ring.

The two men stare at one another.

John Phillips: And now they know.

Mark Bravo: No bracket left to fill in. No hypothetical matchup. No "if." No "maybe." That's your Ring King final.

Mikey raises the WrestleZone Championship slightly.

Mike looks at it.

Then back at Mikey.

A grin slowly forms across Mike's face.

Mikey returns it.

Not friendly.

Not hostile, either.

Recognition.

Mike points toward Mikey.

Then toward himself.

Finally, he points toward the Ring King logo hanging above them.

Mikey nods.

Mark Bravo: Mike Best came into this tournament talking about results.

John Phillips: Well, there's the result. Mike Best versus Mikey Unlikely.

Mark Bravo: One match. One Ring King.

The tournament graphic fills the screen once more.

RING KING 2026 — TOURNAMENT FINAL

MIKEY UNLIKELY

vs.

MIKE BEST

Not Enough

Segment

Several moments later, Katy Winters waits near the backstage entrance.

Kirsty McKinney emerges through the curtain.

She is exhausted.

Her expression makes it immediately clear that an interview is very low on the list of things she wants right now.

Katy approaches carefully.

Katy Winters: Kirsty, I know this probably isn't the moment you want somebody sticking a microphone in your face—

Kirsty McKinney: Then why are you?

Katy pauses.

Katy Winters: Fair question.

Kirsty keeps walking.

Katy follows.

Katy Winters: You came through the qualifiers. You defeated Hakuryu. You eliminated Maxwell Jett. Tonight you made it to the final four—

Kirsty stops.

She turns.

Kirsty McKinney: And lost.

Katy doesn't argue.

Kirsty McKinney: That's the sentence.

Katy Winters: You don't think everything before tonight matters?

Kirsty McKinney: Of course it matters.

A beat.

Kirsty McKinney: It got me here.

She points back toward the arena.

Kirsty McKinney: But I wasn't trying to get here.

Kirsty McKinney: I was trying to get there.

She gestures toward a nearby monitor showing the completed final graphic.

MIKEY UNLIKELY vs. MIKE BEST.

Kirsty looks at it.

Kirsty McKinney: So don't give me the "you should be proud" thing.

Katy Winters: I wasn't going to.

Kirsty looks at her.

Katy Winters: I was going to ask what you learned.

That gets Kirsty's attention.

She thinks about it.

Kirsty McKinney: That Mike Best was better tonight.

No hesitation.

Kirsty McKinney: That's it.

Kirsty McKinney: Not unbeatable.

Kirsty McKinney: Not untouchable.

Kirsty McKinney: Better tonight.

Kirsty glances at the monitor again.

Kirsty McKinney: I can work with that.

Katy Winters: Meaning?

Kirsty McKinney: Meaning now I know where the line is.

She looks back at Katy.

Kirsty McKinney: Next time I cross it.

Kirsty starts walking again.

Then stops herself.

Kirsty McKinney: And Katy?

Katy Winters: Yeah?

Kirsty McKinney: If anybody says I "almost" became Ring King...

A beat.

Kirsty McKinney: ...don't put a microphone near me.

She walks away.

Katy watches her go.

Katy Winters: Fair enough.

Platinum Doesn't Need a Crown

Segment

The scene changes.

Ace Andrews stands with Bianca Page and UTA Fighting Champion Samuel Scythe.

Scythe has the Fighting Championship resting prominently over his shoulder.

Bianca still seems irritated from her earlier encounter with Emily Hightower.

Ace, however, looks perfectly comfortable.

Perhaps suspiciously so.

Ace Andrews: Mikey Unlikely.

Ace nods.

Ace Andrews: Mike Best.

Another nod.

Ace Andrews: Congratulations.

Bianca looks at him.

Bianca Page: That's it?

Ace Andrews: What?

Bianca Page: Congratulations?

Ace Andrews: I'm being gracious.

Bianca Page: It's weird.

Ace Andrews: I can stop.

Bianca Page: Please.

Ace smiles.

Ace Andrews: Here's what everybody is going to talk about for the next eight days.

He gestures toward an unseen monitor.

Ace Andrews: Ring King.

Ace Andrews: Who made it.

Ace Andrews: Who didn't.

Ace Andrews: Who gets the crown.

He looks toward Scythe.

Ace Andrews: Meanwhile...

Scythe lifts the Fighting Championship slightly.

Ace Andrews: We already have gold.

Ace turns toward Bianca.

Ace Andrews: And next Saturday, we go shopping for more.

Bianca smiles.

Bianca Page: Emily already went shopping.

Ace Andrews: Yeah, I saw.

Ace pauses.

Ace Andrews: Still think the baking sheet was a strong choice.

Bianca glares.

Ace Andrews: Moving on.

He steps between Bianca and Scythe.

Ace Andrews: See, people get distracted by tournaments.

Ace Andrews: They see a crown and suddenly everybody thinks that's where power lives.

Ace shakes his head.

Ace Andrews: Platinum Society doesn't need a crown.

He taps Scythe's Fighting Championship.

Ace Andrews: We need championships.

Then points toward Bianca.

Ace Andrews: We need leverage.

Finally, himself.

Ace Andrews: And we need people smart enough to know what to do with both.

Bianca folds her arms.

Bianca Page: So let Mikey and Mike fight over being king.

Ace Andrews: Exactly.

Bianca smiles.

Bianca Page: I'll settle for being champion.

Scythe finally speaks.

Samuel Scythe: First you have to take it.

Bianca turns toward him.

Scythe's expression doesn't change.

Samuel Scythe: Emily will not give it to you.

Bianca studies him.

Then smiles.

Bianca Page: Good.

Bianca Page: I don't want her to.

Ace looks between the two.

Ace Andrews: See?

He smiles proudly.

Ace Andrews: That's why I like you people.

Road to the Final

Segment

The screen fades to black.

A heartbeat begins.

The original Ring King bracket appears.

Sixteen names.

One by one, they disappear.

We see Mikey Unlikely surviving Chris Ross.

Madman Szalinski's attack outside the ring.

Mikey realizing what has happened.

The count reaching ten.

Mikey advancing.

Samuel Scythe bearing down on him in the second round.

Mikey surviving the power.

The scramble.

The inside cradle.

Three.

Then tonight.

Sol Azteca moving faster.

Sol striking harder.

Mikey adapting.

The final scramble.

Three seconds.

Mikey Unlikely advances.

The screen goes black.

MIKEY UNLIKELY

Then Mike Best.

Valkyrie Knox standing across from him in the qualifier.

Impact.

The knee.

Mike advances.

Bobby Dean in the first round.

The International Champion pushing Mike.

Mike surviving.

I KNEED A HERO.

Three.

Mike helping Bobby back to his feet.

Marie Van Claudio in Madison Square Garden.

The Sharpshooter.

Mike trapped.

Trey Mack and Clovis Black walking away.

Mike escaping.

HASHTAG MUTED.

I KNEED A HERO.

Three.

Then tonight.

Kirsty McKinney dragging Mike into her world.

Wrestling.

Control.

Mike fighting through it.

The final opening.

I KNEED A HERO.

Three.

Black.

MIKE BEST

The two names slam onto the screen.

RING KING 2026

TOURNAMENT FINAL

MIKEY UNLIKELY

vs.

MIKE BEST

SEPTEMBER 26

CRYPTO.COM ARENA

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Not an Accident

Segment

Backstage.

Bobby Dean sits alone on a production crate.

The International Championship rests across his thighs.

For once, there is no food.

No joke.

No ridiculous distraction.

Bobby is staring at the championship.

Melissa Cartwright approaches.

Melissa Cartwright: Bobby?

Bobby looks up.

Bobby Dean: Hey, Melissa.

Melissa Cartwright: We're getting close to tonight's main event. Earlier in Scott Stevens' office, you told Eric Dane Jr. that you're taking him seriously.

Bobby nods.

Melissa Cartwright: What's changed?

Bobby looks back down at the International Championship.

Bobby Dean: Me.

Melissa waits.

Bobby Dean: That's the annoying answer, isn't it?

Melissa Cartwright: A little.

Bobby Dean: Yeah.

Bobby adjusts the championship across his legs.

Bobby Dean: Eric thinks I'm a joke.

A shrug.

Bobby Dean: That's fine.

Bobby Dean: Lotta people think I'm a joke.

Bobby Dean: To be fair, I've put a tremendous amount of effort into making that an easy conclusion to reach.

Melissa almost smiles.

Bobby doesn't.

Bobby Dean: Then Mike Best beat me.

A beat.

Bobby Dean: Clean.

Bobby Dean: No excuses.

Bobby Dean: And afterward he told me not to lose this again.

Bobby taps the International Championship.

Bobby Dean: Took me a little while to figure out he wasn't talking about the belt.

Melissa's expression changes.

Bobby Dean: I spent a long time being the guy everybody underestimated.

Bobby Dean: Somewhere along the way...

He looks down at himself.

Bobby Dean: ...I started underestimating him too.

Melissa Cartwright: Eric?

Bobby shakes his head.

Bobby Dean: Me.

Silence.

Bobby stands.

He puts the International Championship over his shoulder.

Bobby Dean: Eric Dane Jr. is good.

Bobby Dean: Really good.

Bobby Dean: He's fast. He's athletic. He's fearless.

Bobby thinks about that last word.

Bobby Dean: Or stupid.

Bobby Dean: Jury's still out.

There's the faintest smile.

Then it's gone.

Bobby Dean: But he's dangerous.

Bobby Dean: And next Saturday, he gets his shot.

Bobby looks directly into the camera.

Bobby Dean: Eric thinks the joke is that Bobby Dean is the International Champion.

A beat.

Bobby Dean: The joke's gonna be when he realizes I wasn't an accident.

Bobby walks away.

Melissa watches him go.

Finally

Segment

Elsewhere backstage.

Eric Dane Jr. is stretching against a wall.

Loose.

Relaxed.

Almost offensively relaxed considering what awaits him.

A production assistant approaches.

Production Assistant: Eric?

Eric continues stretching.

Production Assistant: They're ready for you.

Eric stops.

He looks up.

Eric Dane Jr.: Finally.

Eric stands.

Rolls his neck.

Starts toward the curtain.

Then notices the camera.

He stops.

Looks directly into it.

Eric Dane Jr.: Hey, Bobby.

A grin.

Eric Dane Jr.: Watch close.

Eric walks away.

Ring King

Segment

We return to Mark Bravo and John Phillips at ringside.

The Ring King logo fills the screen behind them.

John Phillips: Next Saturday night, the road ends.

Mark Bravo: Los Angeles. Crypto.com Arena. Ring King.

The graphics begin to cycle.

UTA CHAMPIONSHIP

Chris Ross (c) vs. Madman Szalinski

HARDCORE CHAMPIONSHIP

Emily Hightower (c) vs. Bianca Page

UNITED STATES CHAMPIONSHIP

Hakuryu (c) vs. Yoshii

INTERNATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Bobby Dean (c) vs. Eric Dane Jr.

Then finally...

2026 RING KING TOURNAMENT FINAL

Mikey Unlikely vs. Mike Best

John Phillips: And now we know the final two. Mikey Unlikely. Mike Best. Next Saturday, one of those men becomes the 2026 Ring King.

Mark Bravo: But four of the men competing for championship gold in Los Angeles don't have to wait eight days to get their hands on each other.

The graphic changes.

TONIGHT'S MAIN EVENT

BOBBY DEAN & YOSHII

vs.

ERIC DANE JR. & HAKURYU

John Phillips: The International Champion Bobby Dean teams with the former United States Champion Yoshii.

Mark Bravo: Against Bobby's Ring King challenger Eric Dane Jr. and the man Yoshii wants to take the United States Championship back from, Hakuryu.

John Phillips: Sinja and Jed Eye have both been permitted at ringside under strict orders from Scott Stevens. Neither man is allowed to touch anyone.

Mark Bravo: And Hakuryu gave Sinja an even simpler instruction.

John Phillips: Do nothing.

Mark Bravo: Yeah. Good luck with that.

Phillips looks toward the entrance.

John Phillips: Eight days from now, they compete for championships.

A beat.

John Phillips: Tonight, they don't have to wait.

Mark Bravo: Main event time.

The crowd rises as the lights begin to change.

Hakuryu/Eric Dane Jr. vs Yoshii/Bobby Dean

Match

The camera sweeps across the Mid-America Center one final time tonight.

The crowd is still buzzing from the conclusion of the Ring King semifinals.

At ringside, Mark Bravo and John Phillips sit beneath the glow of the arena lights.

John Phillips: We began tonight with four people still dreaming of becoming the 2026 Ring King.

Mark Bravo: Now there are two.

A graphic fills the screen.

RING KING 2026 — TOURNAMENT FINAL

MIKEY UNLIKELY

vs.

MIKE BEST

John Phillips: Mikey Unlikely. Mike Best. Eight days from tonight, Los Angeles.

Mark Bravo: But we've still got business to handle right here in Council Bluffs.

The graphic changes.

TONIGHT'S MAIN EVENT

BOBBY DEAN & YOSHII

vs.

ERIC DANE JR. & HAKURYU

John Phillips: And Scott Stevens couldn't have put together a more volatile main event if he tried.

Mark Bravo: Two matches from Ring King, thrown together eight days early.

The screen splits.

On one side, Bobby Dean with the International Championship.

Eric Dane Jr. opposite him.

On the other, United States Champion Hakuryu.

Former champion Yoshii.

John Phillips: Bobby Dean defends the International Championship against Eric Dane Junior next Saturday.

Mark Bravo: And Hakuryu defends the United States Championship against Yoshii.

John Phillips: Remember the instructions from Scott Stevens earlier tonight. Sinja and Jed Dye are permitted at ringside. Neither man is permitted to touch anybody.

Mark Bravo: And Hakuryu gave Sinja even stricter instructions. Stand outside. Watch. Learn. Do absolutely nothing.

John Phillips: We'll see how easy that is when Yoshii and Jed Dye are standing ten feet away.

The arena lights change.

"Wolf Totem" by The HU featuring Jacoby Shaddix explodes through the Mid-America Center.

The response is immediate.

Yoshii steps through the curtain.

And for the first few seconds, he's Yoshii.

The enormous smile.

The waving.

The outstretched hands toward the fans.

A young fan along the barricade reaches as far as he possibly can.

Yoshii stops.

Slaps the kid's hand.

The kid nearly falls backward from the force of it and immediately begins laughing.

Yoshii laughs too.

Several feet behind him comes Jed Dye.

Jed is not laughing.

Jed is pointing toward the ring.

Then toward an imaginary watch on his wrist.

Then toward the ring again.

Yoshii notices.

He nods.

Then stops to high-five another fan.

Jed closes his eyes.

Mark Bravo: Jed Dye's blood pressure has to be incredible.

John Phillips: Yoshii has waited weeks to get another match with Hakuryu. I don't think he's particularly worried about Jed's schedule.

That changes Yoshii's expression.

Hakuryu.

The smile becomes smaller.

Yoshii reaches ringside and climbs onto the apron.

The ropes bend noticeably as he steps through them.

He raises one enormous arm.

Yoshii: YOSHII!

The crowd answers him.

Jed enters behind him and immediately begins saying something about maintaining focus.

Yoshii nods along.

Whether he's actually listening is another question.

Then the music changes.

The reaction becomes just as loud, but for an entirely different reason.

Bobby Dean emerges.

The UTA International Championship rests over his shoulder.

He looks toward the crowd.

Then toward the ring.

Then at Yoshii.

Bobby stops.

Looks up.

And up.

And slightly farther up.

Bobby slowly nods.

Bobby Dean: That's a lotta Yoshii.

Yoshii grins.

Yoshii: Bobby!

Bobby points at himself.

Bobby Dean: That's me.

Yoshii opens his arms.

Bobby looks at the offered hug.

He considers the logistics.

Then cautiously steps forward.

Yoshii embraces him.

Bobby's eyes immediately go wide as he disappears against Yoshii's chest.

Mark Bravo: We may have lost the International Champion.

John Phillips: He's still in there.

Mark Bravo: You sure?

Yoshii releases him.

Bobby takes one enormous breath.

Bobby Dean: Strong hug.

Yoshii: Yoshii strong.

Bobby Dean: Yeah. Got that.

The light moment doesn't last.

A gong echoes through the arena.

The lights fall.

White smoke begins spreading across the entrance.

Spiritual chants fill the building.

Sinja emerges first.

White suit.

White facepaint.

Expression completely controlled.

Then Hakuryu appears.

Full pilgrimage garments.

Takuhatsugasa concealing his face.

Walking stick striking against the floor with each measured step.

Yoshii stops smiling.

Everything about him changes.

Jed notices.

So does Bobby.

John Phillips: Look at Yoshii.

Mark Bravo: That's not the guy who was high-fiving kids thirty seconds ago.

Hakuryu walks slowly down the aisle.

Sinja remains beside him.

Yoshii's eyes never leave the United States Championship around Hakuryu's waist.

Hakuryu reaches ringside.

He stops.

Raises his head.

Yoshii and Hakuryu stare at one another.

Hakuryu brings his hands together.

Prayer.

Yoshii waits.

Hakuryu finishes.

Then steps onto the apron.

Sinja holds the ropes open.

Hakuryu enters.

He removes his hat.

Then the outer garments.

Each piece is handed deliberately to Sinja.

Finally, the United States Championship.

Hakuryu pauses before surrendering it.

He looks at Yoshii.

Yoshii looks at the belt.

Hakuryu hands it to Sinja.

Sinja steps to the floor.

Jed moves several feet farther down ringside.

Sinja notices.

Jed notices him noticing.

Jed points toward Sinja.

Then toward himself.

Then holds both hands up.

Very deliberately.

Jed Dye: I am observing the rules.

Sinja says nothing.

Jed Dye: For the record.

Nothing.

Jed Dye: Good.

Jed turns away.

Sinja's jaw tightens.

But he does nothing.

Mark Bravo: That's one.

John Phillips: One what?

Mark Bravo: One opportunity for Sinja to murder Jed Dye that he has successfully declined.

Before Phillips can answer, the arena changes again.

The lights flash.

The boos begin.

Eric Dane Jr. explodes through the curtain.

Tonight's entrance ensemble appears to have been selected by a man who was told to choose one accessory and interpreted that as a personal attack.

Sunglasses.

A sequined headband.

A silver robe.

And, for reasons known only to Eric Dane Jr., a feather boa.

Eric spreads his arms.

Soaking in the reaction.

He points toward himself.

Then toward the ring.

Then mouths:

Eric Dane Jr.: Main event.

He starts down the ramp.

Stops.

Turns back toward the camera.

Eric Dane Jr.: Again.

Then continues.

Mark Bravo: I hate him.

John Phillips: You said that about him last week.

Mark Bravo: I've remained consistent.

Eric reaches ringside.

He looks toward Hakuryu.

Raises a finger.

Eric Dane Jr.: Hey.

Hakuryu doesn't respond.

Eric Dane Jr.: We talked about this earlier.

Hakuryu slowly turns his head.

Eric Dane Jr.: Communication.

Hakuryu stares at him.

Eric gives him a thumbs-up.

Eric Dane Jr.: We're gonna be great.

Hakuryu turns away.

Eric nods to himself.

Eric Dane Jr.: Nailed it.

Then Eric sees Bobby.

The performance disappears.

Not completely.

But enough.

Eric climbs onto the apron.

Bobby steps toward him.

For weeks, Eric has laughed at him.

Talked down to him.

Told him he didn't deserve the championship.

Tonight Bobby doesn't look hurt by it.

He just looks ready.

Eric enters.

He immediately looks at the International Championship.

Bobby removes it from his shoulder.

Eric's eyes follow it.

Bobby holds the championship against his chest.

Eric Dane Jr.: Eight days.

Bobby nods.

Bobby Dean: Yep.

Eric Dane Jr.: That's mine.

Bobby looks at the championship.

Then back at Eric.

Bobby Dean: Nope.

The crowd pops.

Eric smirks.

Eric Dane Jr.: We'll see.

Bobby hands the International Championship to ringside personnel.

Eric watches every inch of its journey.

Then turns back toward Bobby.

The referee begins directing everyone toward their corners.

For a moment, nobody listens.

Yoshii and Hakuryu stand almost nose-to-nose.

Or as close to nose-to-nose as Hakuryu can get with Yoshii.

Bobby and Eric are several feet away doing the same.

The referee gets between the two pairs.

Orders them apart.

Yoshii backs toward his corner.

Hakuryu backs toward his.

Eric points at Bobby.

Eric Dane Jr.: You and me.

Bobby nods.

Bobby Dean: Okay.

Eric turns toward Hakuryu.

Eric Dane Jr.: I got this.

Hakuryu looks at him.

Then calmly steps through the ropes.

Eric grins.

Across the ring, Bobby looks toward Yoshii.

Bobby Dean: You mind?

Yoshii looks at Eric.

Then at Hakuryu.

Yoshii very clearly would rather start with Hakuryu.

But after a moment, he nods.

Yoshii: Bobby fight.

Bobby exhales.

Bobby Dean: Bobby fight.

Yoshii steps onto the apron.

The referee looks toward both corners.

Then signals.

DING! DING!

Eric immediately starts bouncing on the balls of his feet.

Bobby doesn't.

He stands in the middle of the ring.

Watching.

Eric circles.

Bobby turns with him.

Eric circles faster.

Bobby keeps turning.

Eric suddenly stops.

Eric Dane Jr.: You tired yet?

Bobby looks at him.

Bobby Dean: A little.

Eric laughs.

Then charges.

He throws a quick low kick.

Bobby absorbs it.

Eric follows with another.

Then an overhand chop.

Bobby takes that too.

Eric hits the ropes.

Running elbow!

Bobby rocks backward.

Eric hits the ropes again.

Another elbow!

Bobby takes a step back.

Eric points at him.

Eric Dane Jr.: Yeah!

Eric runs again.

Bobby lowers his shoulder.

Eric rebounds.

Shoulder tackle!

Eric hits Bobby.

Eric falls down.

Bobby remains standing.

Silence from Eric.

The crowd laughs.

Bobby looks down.

Bobby Dean: You okay?

Eric sits up.

Eric Dane Jr.: Shut up.

Eric jumps back to his feet.

He runs the ropes again.

This time he LEAPS.

Crossbody!

Bobby catches him.

Eric's eyes widen.

Eric Dane Jr.: Put me down.

Bobby thinks about it.

Bobby Dean: Okay.

FALLAWAY SLAM!

Eric sails across the ring!

The crowd erupts.

Eric rolls onto his stomach.

Bobby looks toward his corner.

Yoshii applauds enthusiastically.

Yoshii: BOBBY!

Bobby smiles.

Mark Bravo: I don't know if I've ever seen Bobby Dean receive positive reinforcement this effectively.

Eric gets back to his feet.

The smile leaves Bobby's face.

Eric sees it happen.

And for just a second, he looks less amused.

John Phillips: This is what we've been talking about. Bobby Dean isn't trying to become somebody else. He's still Bobby Dean.

Mark Bravo: He's just finally starting to understand that being Bobby Dean doesn't mean he has to be everybody's punchline.

Eric comes forward again.

This time more cautiously.

He feints high.

Kicks low.

Bobby reaches.

Eric slips underneath.

Rolling elbow to the back of the head!

Bobby stumbles.

Eric springs to the middle rope.

SPRINGBOARD DROPKICK!

Bobby falls against the ropes.

Eric lands.

Runs.

Another knee!

Bobby drops to one knee.

Eric's eyes light up.

He backs away.

Runs forward.

FLYING KNEE!

Bobby gets both arms up.

The impact still knocks him backward.

Eric covers!

ONE!

Bobby throws him off.

Eric rolls backward and comes up smiling.

Eric Dane Jr.: That's one.

Bobby pushes himself upright.

Bobby Dean: Usually need three.

Eric's smile disappears.

The crowd laughs again.

Eric turns toward Hakuryu.

Eric Dane Jr.: He's doing jokes now.

Hakuryu says nothing.

Eric Dane Jr.: Cool.

Eric turns back.

Bobby is already there.

RIGHT HAND!

Eric goes down.

The reaction is immediate.

Bobby stares at his fist.

Flexes his fingers once.

Bobby Dean: Still hurts.

Mark Bravo: There it is!

John Phillips: That's the same right hand that dropped Eric Dane Junior at One Last Stop!

Eric rolls quickly toward his corner.

Bobby advances.

Eric reaches up.

TAG!

Hakuryu enters.

Bobby stops.

The entire mood shifts.

Hakuryu steps through the ropes.

Slowly.

Calmly.

Hands together for a brief prayer.

Bobby watches him.

Hakuryu lowers his hands.

Bobby glances toward Yoshii.

Yoshii is already holding out his hand.

Bobby looks back at Hakuryu.

Then at Yoshii.

Bobby Dean: I think this one's yours.

Bobby walks to the corner.

TAG.

The building rises.

Yoshii steps over the ropes.

Hakuryu doesn't move.

Yoshii walks toward the center of the ring.

Hakuryu meets him there.

The crowd gets louder.

Neither man attacks.

Not yet.

Yoshii looks down at Hakuryu.

Hakuryu looks up at Yoshii.

John Phillips: Here we go.

At ringside, Jed Dye moves closer to his corner.

Across from him, Sinja remains perfectly still.

Yoshii raises both hands.

Sumo stance.

Hakuryu slowly brings his palms together.

Prayer.

Yoshii waits.

Hakuryu finishes.

His hands lower.

Yoshii grins.

Not the playful grin from his entrance.

This one means something else.

Yoshii: Fight.

Hakuryu gives the slightest nod.

Yoshii charges.

Hakuryu moves.

Just barely.

Yoshii's hands miss him.

Hakuryu circles.

LOW KICK.

It cracks into Yoshii's thigh.

Yoshii turns.

Hakuryu backs away.

Yoshii advances.

Hakuryu waits.

Another kick.

Same leg.

Yoshii absorbs it.

Hakuryu moves again.

Mark Bravo: Hakuryu isn't trying to move Yoshii.

John Phillips: He's studying him.

Mark Bravo: Exactly. Five hundred eighty-three pounds. You're not going to win the first exchange by proving you're stronger. You find out how the machine moves first.

Hakuryu throws another kick.

Yoshii catches it.

The crowd erupts.

Hakuryu's eyes widen slightly.

Yoshii pulls him forward.

SUMO HEADBUTT!

Hakuryu drops.

Yoshii roars.

Yoshii: YOSHII!

Hakuryu rolls toward the ropes.

Yoshii follows.

Hakuryu gets up.

SUMO CHOP!

The sound echoes through the building.

Hakuryu's chest snaps backward.

Another!

Hakuryu backs into the corner.

Yoshii grabs him.

Irish whip across the ring!

Hakuryu hits the opposite turnbuckles.

Yoshii charges.

Hakuryu sees all five hundred eighty-three pounds coming.

He dives out of the corner.

Yoshii crashes chest-first into the turnbuckles.

Hakuryu immediately turns.

SUPERKICK TO THE BACK OF THE KNEE!

Yoshii drops to one knee.

Hakuryu doesn't celebrate.

He simply watches.

Yoshii begins standing.

Hakuryu kicks the same leg.

Yoshii stumbles.

Hakuryu backs away.

Prayer.

TORNADO KICK!

Yoshii rocks sideways.

But doesn't fall.

Hakuryu studies him.

Then another kick to the leg.

John Phillips: There it is. Hakuryu has chosen his target.

Mark Bravo: Take away the base. Doesn't matter how big Yoshii is if you can make those legs stop carrying him.

Hakuryu goes back to the leg.

Yoshii suddenly lunges forward.

He catches Hakuryu around the body.

Hakuryu's feet leave the mat.

SIDE BELLY-TO-BELLY SUPLEX!

Hakuryu crashes down.

Yoshii sits up.

The crowd roars.

Yoshii looks toward Hakuryu.

Hakuryu rolls onto his side.

For the first time, the White Dragon looks genuinely rattled.

Yoshii stands.

Hakuryu pushes himself upward.

Yoshii comes forward.

Hakuryu fires another kick into the damaged leg.

Yoshii grimaces.

But keeps coming.

Hakuryu kicks it again.

Yoshii keeps coming.

Hakuryu finally retreats into his own corner.

Eric reaches over.

Slaps Hakuryu on the shoulder.

TAG.

Hakuryu slowly turns his head.

Eric is already entering.

Eric Dane Jr.: I got him.

Hakuryu stares at him.

Eric Dane Jr.: Trust me.

Hakuryu steps through the ropes.

Yoshii looks at Eric.

Eric looks at Yoshii.

Eric's confidence lasts approximately two seconds.

He looks back at Hakuryu.

Eric Dane Jr.: You know what?

Hakuryu stares.

Eric turns back toward Yoshii.

Eric Dane Jr.: Never mind.

Yoshii charges.

Eric's eyes go wide.

He dives sideways.

Yoshii barely misses him.

Eric scrambles back up.

Yoshii turns.

Eric immediately starts throwing everything he has.

Chop!

Elbow!

Kick!

Another elbow!

Yoshii takes all of it.

Eric backs away.

Yoshii advances.

Eric hits the ropes.

SPRINGBOARD—

Yoshii catches him.

Eric hangs horizontally across Yoshii's chest.

He looks toward his corner.

Eric Dane Jr.: Little help?

Hakuryu doesn't move.

Eric Dane Jr.: Communication!

Yoshii smiles.

SAMOAN DROP!

Eric disappears beneath Yoshii.

The crowd erupts.

Yoshii hooks the leg.

ONE!

TWO!

Hakuryu steps through the ropes.

Yoshii releases the cover himself.

He stands.

Hakuryu stops.

The referee orders Hakuryu back.

Hakuryu doesn't argue.

He simply steps onto the apron again.

Yoshii watches him the entire way.

Eric rolls toward the opposite side of the ring.

Yoshii barely notices.

John Phillips: Yoshii had Eric Dane Junior in trouble and he broke his own cover just because Hakuryu entered the ring.

Mark Bravo: That's what I'm watching, John. This thing with Hakuryu is becoming more important to Yoshii than the match happening around him.

Yoshii finally turns back toward Eric.

Eric is gone.

Yoshii looks around.

Then toward his own corner.

Eric has rolled all the way across the ring and tagged Bobby Dean.

Except Bobby is on the opposite team.

The referee stares at Eric.

Bobby stares at Eric.

Eric looks at the hand he just slapped.

Then at Bobby.

Eric Dane Jr.: That doesn't count.

Bobby Dean: I don't think it does.

The crowd laughs.

Eric turns around.

Yoshii is standing behind him.

Eric freezes.

Eric Dane Jr.: Hakuryu?

Hakuryu does nothing.

Yoshii reaches down.

Grabs Eric.

And throws him across the ring with a massive FRONT POWERSLAM!

Eric bounces off the canvas.

Yoshii gets to his feet.

He looks toward Hakuryu again.

Hakuryu looks back.

At ringside, Sinja remains motionless.

Jed Dye begins applauding.

Loudly.

Obnoxiously.

Sinja turns his eyes toward him.

Jed notices.

He applauds even louder.

Sinja's hands tighten behind his back.

But he does nothing.

Mark Bravo: That's two.

John Phillips: You're actually counting.

Mark Bravo: I respect personal growth.

Yoshii turns back toward Eric.

Eric is crawling toward Hakuryu.

Yoshii reaches for him.

Eric lunges.

TAG!

Hakuryu enters.

Yoshii immediately forgets Eric exists.

Hakuryu steps into the ring.

Yoshii meets him.

No hesitation this time.

Hakuryu kicks the damaged leg.

Yoshii answers with a sumo chop.

Hakuryu kicks again.

Yoshii chops again.

Kick.

Chop.

Kick.

CHOP.

Hakuryu staggers.

Yoshii grabs him.

Hakuryu slips free.

HANDSPRING BACK ELBOW!

It catches Yoshii in the jaw.

Yoshii rocks backward.

Hakuryu hits the ropes.

PRAYING STANDING MOONSAULT!

Yoshii gets the knees up!

Hakuryu crashes across them!

Both men are down.

The crowd rises.

John Phillips: Eight days!

Mark Bravo: That's what we're getting a preview of! Eight days from now there are no partners and there is nowhere else for either one of these men to look!

Yoshii rolls toward Bobby.

Hakuryu rolls toward Eric.

Both corners reach.

Yoshii gets closer.

Hakuryu does too.

Hands stretch.

Yoshii reaches—

TAG!

Bobby Dean enters.

Hakuryu reaches—

TAG!

Eric Dane Jr. enters.

The crowd erupts again.

Bobby and Eric charge.

And collide in the center of the ring.

The fight is on.

Bobby Dean and Eric Dane Jr. meet in the center of the ring.

Eric throws first.

Right hand!

Bobby answers!

Eric fires another!

Bobby fires back!

Eric!

Bobby!

Eric!

BOBBY!

The International Champion's heavier shot sends Eric stumbling backward.

Bobby follows.

Another right hand!

Eric hits the ropes.

Bobby grabs him on the rebound—

Eric twists free!

PELE KICK!

Bobby staggers.

Eric lands on his feet and immediately explodes forward.

RUNNING DROPKICK!

Bobby crashes backward into the corner.

Eric doesn't waste a second.

He charges.

HIGH KNEE!

Bobby's head snaps backward.

Eric lands.

Backs across the ring.

Charges again—

Bobby moves!

Eric catches himself against the turnbuckles before impact.

He turns—

Bobby crushes him with a corner splash!

Eric crumples.

Bobby backs away.

Looks at him.

Then runs.

Well.

Bobby's version of running.

Mark Bravo: Incoming!

Eric rolls away!

Bobby hits the turnbuckles!

Eric springs onto the middle rope.

SPRINGBOARD ROUNDHOUSE!

Bobby drops to one knee.

Eric hits the ropes.

RUNNING KNEE!

Bobby goes down!

Eric covers!

ONE!

TWO!

Bobby kicks out!

Eric immediately looks toward the referee.

Two fingers.

The referee confirms it.

Eric looks back at Bobby.

The smile returns.

But there's something different behind it now.

John Phillips: Eric Dane Junior is smiling, but I think something just registered with him.

Mark Bravo: Bobby can be hurt.

John Phillips: Exactly.

Mark Bravo: That's dangerous information to give someone like Eric.

Eric grabs Bobby by the head.

Drags him toward the wrong corner.

Bobby resists.

Eric clubs him across the back.

Again.

Then drives a knee into Bobby's stomach.

Bobby folds forward.

Eric grabs the wrist.

TAG.

Hakuryu enters.

Eric holds Bobby in place.

Hakuryu studies the International Champion.

Then—

THUD!

A brutal kick into Bobby's ribs.

Bobby doubles over.

Eric releases him and steps onto the apron.

Hakuryu immediately kicks Bobby's leg.

Then the other.

Bobby reaches for him.

Hakuryu moves away.

Another kick.

Bobby turns.

Hakuryu attacks the ribs.

Bobby swings.

Nothing.

Hakuryu is already gone.

John Phillips: Completely different problem for Bobby Dean now.

Mark Bravo: Eric wants to overwhelm you. Hakuryu wants to dismantle you.

Bobby tries closing the distance.

Hakuryu sidesteps.

Kick to the thigh.

Bobby grimaces.

Hakuryu circles behind.

Kick behind the knee!

Bobby drops.

Hakuryu immediately snaps another kick across the chest.

Bobby falls backward.

Cover!

ONE!

TWO!

Bobby powers out.

Hakuryu rises without complaint.

He looks across the ring.

Yoshii is watching him.

Hakuryu looks back.

The match disappears from both men's minds for just a second.

Yoshii points at himself.

Then at Hakuryu.

Yoshii: You. Me.

Hakuryu's eyes narrow.

He takes one step toward Yoshii.

Eric reaches through the ropes.

Eric Dane Jr.: Hey!

Hakuryu stops.

Eric holds out his hand.

Eric Dane Jr.: Remember? Teamwork?

Hakuryu stares at him.

Eric Dane Jr.: I realize this is apparently a new concept for everybody tonight.

Hakuryu turns back toward Bobby.

Then tags Eric.

Eric Dane Jr.: See?

Eric steps through the ropes.

Eric Dane Jr.: Communication.

Hakuryu walks past him onto the apron.

Eric catches Bobby with a stomp before the champion can stand.

Then another.

He drags Bobby upright.

Bobby suddenly shoves him away!

Eric rolls backward.

Springs back to his feet.

Bobby lunges for Yoshii—

Eric dives.

He catches Bobby's ankle!

Bobby falls forward.

His fingertips come within inches of Yoshii's hand.

Eric drags him backward.

Bobby kicks him away.

Eric rolls through.

Bobby crawls again.

Eric sprints forward—

BASEMENT DROPKICK!

Bobby collapses.

Eric rolls him over.

ONE!

TWO!

Bobby kicks out!

Eric immediately mounts him.

Right hand.

Right hand.

Right hand.

The referee warns him.

Eric stops at four.

Gets up.

And looks toward the International Championship sitting at ringside.

He points at it.

Eric Dane Jr.: Eight days, Bobby!

Bobby rolls onto his side.

Eric Dane Jr.: Eight days!

Eric pulls Bobby up.

Eric Dane Jr.: You finally gonna take me seriously?

Bobby suddenly grabs Eric by the back of the head.

HEADBUTT!

Eric staggers.

Bobby falls backward against the ropes.

Eric shakes it off.

Charges.

Bobby catches him—

SPINEBUSTER!

Both men are down!

The crowd comes alive.

John Phillips: Bobby Dean desperately needs the tag!

Mark Bravo: So does Eric!

Yoshii stretches as far over the top rope as he can.

Yoshii: BOBBY!

Bobby begins crawling.

Across the ring, Hakuryu extends his hand.

Eric rolls toward him.

Bobby crawls toward Yoshii.

Eric reaches—

TAG!

Hakuryu enters.

Bobby lunges—

TAG!

YOSHII!

The crowd erupts.

Yoshii steps into the ring.

Hakuryu stops.

So does Yoshii.

Then they charge.

Yoshii swings with a massive sumo chop.

Hakuryu ducks!

LOW KICK!

Yoshii turns.

Another low kick!

Hakuryu tries a third—

Yoshii catches the leg!

Hakuryu hops on one foot.

Yoshii pulls him forward.

SHORT-ARM SUMO CHOP!

Hakuryu crashes onto his back!

Yoshii roars!

The crowd roars with him!

Hakuryu rolls toward the ropes.

Yoshii follows.

Hakuryu rises.

Yoshii grabs him.

HEADBUTT!

Hakuryu stumbles into the corner.

Yoshii backs across the ring.

Charges!

AVALANCHE!

Hakuryu is crushed against the turnbuckles!

Yoshii backs away.

Hakuryu collapses forward.

Yoshii catches him.

He wraps both arms around the United States Champion.

BELLY-TO-BELLY SUPLEX!

Hakuryu hits hard!

Yoshii covers!

ONE!

TWO!

ERIC BREAKS IT UP!

Eric dives onto Yoshii's back.

The referee immediately orders him out.

Yoshii rises.

Slowly.

Eric realizes he's still standing directly behind Yoshii.

Eric Dane Jr.: Okay.

Yoshii turns.

Eric Dane Jr.: I'm leaving.

Eric starts backing toward his corner.

Yoshii follows.

Eric Dane Jr.: Ref!

The referee gets between them.

Eric slides underneath the bottom rope.

Yoshii turns back—

SUPERKICK!

Hakuryu catches Yoshii flush!

Yoshii staggers.

Hakuryu hits another!

Yoshii drops to one knee.

Hakuryu backs into the ropes.

SPRINGBOARD SPINNING WHEEL KICK!

Yoshii falls!

Hakuryu covers!

ONE!

TWO!

YOSHII POWERS OUT!

Hakuryu rolls away.

Immediately back to his feet.

Prayer.

He waits.

Yoshii begins rising.

Hakuryu explodes forward.

TORNADO KICK!

Yoshii catches him!

Hakuryu is trapped across Yoshii's chest!

Yoshii adjusts.

Hakuryu starts throwing elbows!

One!

Two!

Three!

Yoshii's grip loosens.

Hakuryu slips behind him.

He attacks the knee!

Yoshii drops again.

Hakuryu immediately grabs the leg.

He twists.

Yoshii shouts.

Hakuryu drops his weight across the knee.

Again.

Yoshii kicks him away with the other leg.

Hakuryu rolls to the floor.

Yoshii follows.

John Phillips: Yoshii, don't do this!

Hakuryu gets to his feet outside.

Yoshii steps down from the apron.

The referee begins counting.

ONE!

Hakuryu kicks the leg.

Yoshii answers with a chop.

TWO!

Hakuryu staggers along ringside.

Yoshii follows.

THREE!

Hakuryu suddenly stops.

Turns.

Another kick to the knee!

Yoshii drops against the barricade.

FOUR!

Hakuryu charges.

Yoshii catches him.

Hakuryu's feet leave the floor.

Yoshii drives him BACK-FIRST into the barricade!

FIVE!

The crowd erupts.

Yoshii doesn't release him.

He pulls Hakuryu away from the barricade.

Hakuryu fires an elbow.

Yoshii answers with a headbutt.

SIX!

Jed Dye is screaming.

Jed Dye: COUNT! COUNT! RETURN TO THE DESIGNATED COMPETITION AREA!

Yoshii doesn't even look at him.

Neither does Hakuryu.

SEVEN!

Hakuryu shoves Yoshii away.

Slides underneath the bottom rope.

Then immediately rolls back out.

The count resets.

Mark Bravo: Oh, come on.

John Phillips: Hakuryu just broke the count!

Mark Bravo: That's what I mean. Winning this match isn't the priority anymore.

Hakuryu walks directly back toward Yoshii.

Yoshii smiles.

Yoshii: Good.

They collide again.

Forearm from Hakuryu!

Chop from Yoshii!

Kick!

Chop!

Kick!

HEADBUTT!

Hakuryu stumbles backward.

Right toward Sinja.

Yoshii charges.

Hakuryu moves.

Yoshii stops himself inches before colliding with Sinja.

Sinja does not move.

Not one step.

Yoshii looks at him.

Sinja looks back.

Jed Dye comes charging around the corner.

Jed Dye: Don't you touch him!

Sinja turns toward Jed.

Jed stops.

There it is.

The same tension from the parking lot.

The same man Sinja attacked eight days ago.

Jed realizes how close he has gotten.

His confidence diminishes substantially.

Jed Dye: Which, to be clear, you are contractually prohibited from doing.

Sinja stares at him.

His hands remain at his sides.

Jed points toward the ring.

Jed Dye: Good.

Sinja says nothing.

Jed Dye: We're all learning.

Sinja closes his eyes for one second.

Then opens them.

Still nothing.

Mark Bravo: Three.

John Phillips: That one might've actually killed him.

Mark Bravo: I'm proud of Sinja.

Yoshii turns back toward Hakuryu—

ROUNDHOUSE!

Hakuryu catches him in the head!

Yoshii falls against the apron.

Hakuryu rolls into the ring.

Yoshii grabs the ropes and pulls himself onto the apron.

Hakuryu charges.

Yoshii drives a shoulder through the ropes!

Hakuryu folds.

Yoshii steps through.

Hakuryu grabs the damaged leg.

DRAGON SCREW!

Yoshii crashes down!

Hakuryu keeps the leg!

He twists again!

Yoshii reaches toward the ropes.

Hakuryu drags him toward the center.

Yoshii uses his free leg to shove Hakuryu away.
Hakuryu rolls backward.
Yoshii gets onto one knee.
Hakuryu charges.
Yoshii rises—
AND LAUNCHES HAKURYU OVER THE TOP ROPE!
Hakuryu crashes onto the floor!
Yoshii doesn't hesitate.
He steps over the top rope after him.
The referee throws both hands up in frustration.
John Phillips: Yoshii, you're legal!
Mark Bravo: He knows!
John Phillips: Does he?!
Mark Bravo: He just doesn't care!
Yoshii drops to the floor.
Hakuryu rises.
They start fighting again.
Not toward the ring.
Away from it.
Hakuryu fires a kick.
Yoshii answers with a chop.
They move toward the barricade.
Then toward the timekeeper's area.
Then around it.
The referee begins another count.
Neither listens.
Eric watches from his corner.
Then looks toward Sinja.
Eric Dane Jr.: Hey!
Sinja looks at him.
Eric points toward Hakuryu.
Eric Dane Jr.: Go get him!
Sinja remains still.

Eric Dane Jr.: He's your guy!

Nothing.

Eric Dane Jr.: Do manager stuff!

Sinja looks at Hakuryu.

Then back at Eric.

Nothing.

Eric throws his arms up.

Eric Dane Jr.: What do you even do?!

Sinja slowly turns his head toward Eric.

Eric pauses.

Eric Dane Jr.: Don't answer that.

On the opposite apron, Bobby Dean has recovered.

He's watching Yoshii and Hakuryu disappear farther around ringside.

Bobby Dean: Yoshii!

No response.

Bobby Dean: Buddy!

Yoshii lands another thunderous chop.

Hakuryu answers with another kick.

Bobby Dean: Okay.

Bobby looks across the ring.

Eric looks back at him.

Both men slowly realize the same thing.

Their partners have effectively abandoned them.

Eric looks toward the referee.

Then toward Bobby.

Eric Dane Jr.: So...

Bobby looks around.

Bobby Dean: Are we legal?

The referee looks like he deeply regrets his career choices.

He points toward Yoshii outside.

Then toward Eric's corner.

Eric thinks.

Eric Dane Jr.: I have no idea what that means.

The referee continues counting.

EIGHT!

Bobby realizes.

Bobby Dean: Oh.

Bobby steps through the ropes.

Drops to the floor.

And walks toward Yoshii.

Bobby Dean: Hey, Yoshii?

NINE!

Bobby reaches out.

TAG!

He slaps Yoshii across the shoulder.

Yoshii stops.

Looks at Bobby.

Bobby points toward the ring.

Bobby Dean: I think we're about to lose.

Yoshii looks toward the referee.

Finally.

Bobby dives underneath the bottom rope!

The referee stops the count!

The crowd cheers.

John Phillips: Bobby Dean just saved this match!

Mark Bravo: I can't believe Bobby Dean is the responsible one.

Yoshii immediately turns back toward Hakuryu.

Hakuryu is already coming at him.

They collide again outside.

Bobby gets to his feet inside the ring.

He looks through the ropes.

Bobby Dean: He's okay.

Bobby turns around.

Eric Dane Jr. is standing behind him.

The grin is gone.

For once, Eric isn't performing for anybody.

He looks at Bobby.

Then at the International Championship at ringside.

Then back at Bobby.

Eric Dane Jr.: Guess it's us.

Bobby nods.

Bobby Dean: Guess so.

Eric steps through the ropes.

The referee starts to object.

Eric points outside.

Eric Dane Jr.: Seriously?

The referee looks toward Yoshii and Hakuryu beating the hell out of each other at ringside.

Then back at Eric.

Eric shrugs.

And Bobby charges.

RIGHT HAND!

Eric ducks!

SUPERKICK!

Bobby stumbles backward.

Eric grabs him.

DDT!

Bobby spikes into the canvas!

Eric rolls him over!

ONE!

TWO!

BOBBY KICKS OUT!

Eric sits up.

He looks at the referee.

Then slowly toward Bobby.

No smile.

He stands.

Backs into the corner.

And waits.

John Phillips: Eric Dane Junior has stopped joking.

Mark Bravo: That's what Bobby wanted.

Bobby begins pushing himself up.

Mark Bravo: The problem is Bobby may be about to find out why everybody else should've wanted Eric to keep joking.

Eric Dane Jr. waits in the corner.

Bobby Dean pushes himself up.

One knee.

Then the other.

Eric leans forward.

Ready to explode.

Bobby reaches his feet.

Eric charges!

FLYING KNEE—

BOBBY CATCHES HIM!

Eric's eyes go wide!

Bobby has him around the waist!

BELLY-TO-BELLY SUPLEX!

Eric sails across the ring!

He hits hard and rolls all the way into the corner.

Bobby drops to one knee.

He grabs the middle rope.

Pulls himself upright.

Eric is already moving.

He charges again.

Bobby turns.

RIGHT HAND!

Eric's entire body goes limp for a split second.

He collapses.

The crowd erupts.

John Phillips: DOWN GOES DANE!

Mark Bravo: Eric forgot about the right hand!

Bobby falls on top of him!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

ERIC GETS THE SHOULDER UP!

Bobby rolls onto his back.

He stares upward.

Eric lies beside him.

Neither moves.

John Phillips: Eric Dane Junior survived it!

Mark Bravo: Eight days ago, maybe Eric laughs that off. Tonight he can't. Tonight he knows Bobby Dean can put his lights out with one shot.

Bobby turns his head.

Looks at Eric.

Eric turns his.

They stare at each other from the canvas.

Eric smiles.

Bobby shakes his head.

Bobby Dean: You're weird.

Eric laughs.

Then both men start getting up.

Outside the ring, Yoshii and Hakuryu are still fighting.

Hakuryu drives a kick into Yoshii's damaged leg.

Yoshii answers with a massive chop.

Hakuryu stumbles backward toward the barricade.

Yoshii charges.

Hakuryu moves.

Yoshii crashes into the barricade!

The metal shifts from the impact.

Hakuryu immediately attacks the leg again.

Yoshii drops to one knee.

Hakuryu backs away.

He runs forward.

Yoshii EXPLODES upward!

SUMO HEADBUTT!

Hakuryu drops!

Yoshii grabs him.

Pulls him back up.

Hakuryu fires an elbow.

Yoshii answers.

They begin fighting toward the entrance aisle.

John Phillips: Somebody has to get those two under control!

Mark Bravo: Who?!

Phillips doesn't have an answer.

At ringside, Jed Dye does.

Unfortunately.

Jed Dye: YOSHII!

Yoshii doesn't hear him.

Jed Dye: YOSHII! STRATEGIC WITHDRAWAL!

Nothing.

Jed Dye: THAT MEANS COME BACK!

Jed starts after him.

He gets three steps.

Then remembers Sinja.

Jed turns.

Sinja remains beside the ring.

Still.

Watching.

Jed points two fingers at his own eyes.

Then toward Sinja.

Jed Dye: I'm watching you.

Sinja says nothing.

Jed starts walking backward toward Yoshii.

Jed Dye: Still watching.

Sinja's eyes follow him.

Jed Dye: Constantly observing.

Jed turns around.

Sinja takes one step forward.

Jed immediately spins back.

Sinja stops.

Jed points.

Jed Dye: Aha!

Sinja stares.

Jed Dye: That was a step.

Sinja looks down at his feet.

Then back at Jed.

Jed Dye: I'm counting that.

Mark Bravo: I don't think Scott Stevens prohibited walking.

John Phillips: Don't encourage either one of them.

Sinja takes one deliberate step backward.

Returning to exactly where he was.

Jed nods.

Jed Dye: Corrective action accepted.

Then Jed runs after Yoshii.

Sinja watches him leave.

His fists tighten.

But he remains where Hakuryu told him to remain.

He does nothing.

Back inside the ring, Bobby and Eric are standing again.

Eric throws a right hand.

Bobby blocks.

Bobby throws one.

Eric ducks.

Kick to the thigh!

Bobby swings again.

Eric ducks again.

Kick to the ribs!

Bobby grabs him.

Eric fires an elbow into the jaw.

Bobby releases.

Eric hits the ropes.

Bobby catches him coming back.

SIDEWALK SLAM!

Eric crashes down!

Bobby covers!

ONE!

TWO!

ERIC KICKS OUT!

Bobby sits up.

He looks toward his corner.

Empty.

Yoshii and Hakuryu are halfway toward the entrance now.

Bobby looks back toward Eric's corner.

Also empty.

He shrugs.

Bobby Dean: Guess we're doing this.

Eric hears him.

He pushes himself onto his knees.

Eric Dane Jr.: Been trying to.

Bobby stands.

He pulls Eric up.

Eric suddenly jumps.

ENZUIGIRI!

Bobby staggers into the ropes.

Eric runs.

SPRINGBOARD CROSSBODY!

Bobby catches him again!

Eric Dane Jr.: Oh, come on!

Bobby throws him backward!

FALLAWAY SLAM!

Eric lands hard.

But rolls through the impact!

He comes up against the ropes.

Bobby charges.

Eric pulls the top rope down!

Bobby tumbles over!

The International Champion lands on the floor.

Eric immediately gets to his feet.

He looks down at Bobby.

Then at the ropes.

Then toward the crowd.

The crowd realizes what he's thinking.

John Phillips: Eric, don't.

Mark Bravo: You know that's never worked.

Eric runs.

He hits the opposite ropes.

Full speed.

SUICIDE DIVE!

BOBBY CATCHES HIM!

The crowd explodes.

Eric is suspended in Bobby's arms.

His eyes widen.

Eric Dane Jr.: This is becoming a problem.

Bobby turns.

And drives Eric BACK-FIRST into the apron!

Eric screams.

Bobby doesn't release him.

He turns again.

Eric begins hammering elbows against Bobby's head.

One!

Two!

Three!

Bobby drops him.

Eric lands on his feet.

SUPERKICK!

Bobby stumbles backward.

Eric runs onto the apron.

He jumps to the middle rope.

SPRINGBOARD MOONSAULT!

Both men crash onto the floor!

The crowd rises.

John Phillips: Good God!

Mark Bravo: This kid has no self-preservation!

Eric rolls away clutching his ribs.

Bobby lies flat on the floor.

The referee begins counting.

ONE!

Eric gets onto all fours.

TWO!

Bobby rolls onto his side.

THREE!

Eric grabs the apron.

Pulls himself upward.

FOUR!

Eric slides into the ring.

Then immediately rolls back out.

The count resets.

Eric points toward the referee.

Eric Dane Jr.: Learned that from him.

He gestures toward wherever Hakuryu and Yoshii have disappeared.

Mark Bravo: Oh, great. Hakuryu taught him something.

Eric grabs Bobby.

Tries pulling him upright.

Bobby shoves him away.

Eric comes back.

Bobby catches him with a forearm.

Eric answers.

Bobby answers.

Eric.

Bobby.

Eric kicks Bobby in the stomach.

Then rolls him into the ring.

Eric climbs onto the apron.

Bobby pushes himself up.

Eric grips the top rope.

SPRINGBOARD—

BOBBY MOVES!

Eric lands on his feet.

Turns.

RIGHT HAND!

Eric ducks!

Bobby's momentum carries him around.

Eric grabs him from behind.

BACKSTABBER!

Bobby crashes backward across Eric's knees!

Eric hooks both legs!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

BOBBY KICKS OUT!

Eric rolls away.

He slaps the canvas.

Not out of frustration.

Energy.

Adrenaline.

He stands.

Looks at Bobby.

Then climbs onto the turnbuckles.

John Phillips: Eric Dane Junior is going up!

Mark Bravo: That's never a sentence that ends calmly.

Eric reaches the top.

Bobby remains down.

Eric stands.

He looks out over the crowd.

Then down at Bobby.

He jumps.

450 SPLASH!

BOBBY MOVES!

Eric crashes stomach-first into the canvas!

The entire building groans.

Eric rolls across the ring clutching his ribs.

Bobby gets onto one knee.

He looks at Eric.

Then at the corner.

Bobby gets up.

Eric pulls himself upright against the turnbuckles.

Bobby charges.

AVALANCHE!

Eric disappears beneath Bobby!

Bobby backs away.

Eric stumbles forward.

Bobby scoops him up.

BODY SLAM!

Eric bounces.

Bobby looks toward the crowd.

They know.

Bobby hits the ropes.

He comes back.

BIG SPLASH!

Eric moves!

Bobby crashes into the canvas!

Eric crawls toward the corner.

Bobby clutches his ribs.

Eric pulls himself up.

Bobby gets onto one knee.

Eric sees him.

He runs.

SHINING WIZARD!

Bobby's head snaps backward!

Eric covers!

ONE!

TWO!

THR—

BOBBY GETS THE SHOULDER UP!

Eric sits back on his knees.

The crowd roars.

Eric stares at Bobby.

John Phillips: Bobby Dean will not stay down!

Mark Bravo: And now Eric is learning something Bobby already figured out earlier tonight.

John Phillips: What's that?

Mark Bravo: The guy across from him is real.

Eric stands.

He wipes sweat from his face.

No posing.

No shouting at the crowd.

He grabs Bobby.

Pulls him upright.

Bobby fires a right hand.

Eric blocks!

Eric throws one.

Bobby blocks!

Bobby grabs him around the waist.

Eric fights.

Bobby lifts.

Eric slips down behind!

Bobby turns.

SUPERKICK!

Bobby staggers.

Eric runs toward the ropes.

SPRINGBOARD CUTTER!

Bobby crashes down!

Eric covers!

ONE!

TWO!

BOBBY KICKS OUT AGAIN!

Eric rolls onto his back.

He laughs once.

Not because anything is funny.

Because he can't quite believe Bobby is still there.

Eric sits up.

Eric Dane Jr.: Okay.

He gets to his feet.

Eric Dane Jr.: Okay, Bobby.

Bobby begins crawling toward the ropes.

Eric follows.

He grabs Bobby by the head.

Bobby suddenly throws another right!

Eric ducks!

Bobby turns.

Eric kicks him in the stomach.

Hooks the head.

Eric looks toward the corner.

The crowd rises.

John Phillips: Wait a minute.

Eric starts pulling Bobby toward the turnbuckles.

Mark Bravo: No.

John Phillips: Eric Dane Junior may be thinking SD3!

Bobby realizes it.

He drives Eric backward into the corner.

Eric's back hits the turnbuckles.

Bobby drives his shoulder into Eric's stomach.

Again!

Again!

Eric releases.

Bobby backs away.
Eric gasps for air.
Bobby charges.
Eric gets a boot up!
Bobby staggers.
Eric climbs onto the middle rope.
Bobby comes back.
Eric jumps over him!
Lands behind!
Bobby turns.
Eric leaps!
TORNADO DDT!
Bobby spikes into the canvas!
Eric rolls through.
He doesn't cover.
He looks at Bobby.
Then toward the top rope.
Mark Bravo: Kid, take the pin!
John Phillips: Eric wants more!
Eric climbs.
Fast.
Bobby begins stirring.
Eric reaches the top.
He stands.
Bobby gets to one knee.
Eric looks down.
His eyes widen.
He changes plans.
Eric leaps—
MISSILE DROPKICK!
Bobby gets blasted backward!
Eric hits hard too.
Both men are down.

The crowd applauds.

Outside the ring, a roar erupts.

The camera turns.

Yoshii and Hakuryu are coming back.

Still fighting.

Jed Dye follows several feet behind them, shouting useless instructions.

Hakuryu kicks Yoshii in the leg.

Yoshii answers with a chop.

Hakuryu stumbles toward the ring.

Yoshii follows.

Hakuryu rolls underneath the bottom rope.

Yoshii enters after him.

The referee immediately intercepts them.

John Phillips: They're not legal!

Mark Bravo: You think they care?!

Hakuryu kicks Yoshii!

Yoshii answers with a headbutt!

The referee tries separating them.

Impossible.

Yoshii grabs Hakuryu around the waist.

Hakuryu fires elbows.

Yoshii lifts him anyway!

Hakuryu rakes his forearm across Yoshii's face.

Yoshii loses the grip.

Hakuryu hits the ropes.

Yoshii charges.

Both men tumble through the ropes!

They crash onto the floor!

And immediately start fighting again.

Sinja stands only feet away.

Hakuryu takes a huge chop.

He drops to one knee.

Sinja's body moves instinctively.

Half a step.

He stops.

Hakuryu looks up.

His eyes find Sinja.

Sinja freezes.

Hakuryu says nothing.

He doesn't have to.

Sinja steps backward.

Hands behind his back.

Nothing.

John Phillips: Sinja almost went!

Mark Bravo: Almost doesn't count. Hakuryu told him to do nothing, and somehow he's doing it.

Yoshii grabs Hakuryu again.

Hakuryu kicks the leg.

Yoshii releases.

Hakuryu retreats toward the barricade.

Yoshii follows.

Their fight continues away from the ring.

Inside, Bobby and Eric are recovering.

Bobby gets up first.

Eric reaches one knee.

Bobby grabs him.

Eric throws an elbow.

Bobby holds on.

Eric throws another.

Bobby lifts him.

Eric slips behind!

Bobby turns.

SUPERKICK!

Bobby stumbles but stays upright.

Eric throws another!

Bobby catches the foot!

Eric hops.

Bobby pulls him forward—

RIGHT HAND!

ERIC DUCKS!

Bobby spins around.

Eric jumps onto the middle rope.

SPRINGBOARD—

Bobby catches him!

Eric struggles in his arms.

Bobby adjusts.

Eric drives a knee into Bobby's head!

Bobby loses his grip.

Eric lands.

Bobby swings.

Eric ducks.

Eric grabs Bobby's head.

He runs toward the corner.

UP THE TURNBUCKLES!

The crowd rises.

John Phillips: ERIC!

Eric reaches the top.

He kicks away from the turnbuckles.

SHOOTING STAR DDT!

SD3!

Bobby Dean is SPIKED into the canvas!

The entire building erupts.

Eric rolls Bobby over.

Hooks the leg.

The referee dives into position.

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

DING! DING! DING!

For a moment, Eric Dane Jr. doesn't move.

Neither does Bobby Dean.

Then the realization hits Eric.

His eyes widen.

He sits upright.

The referee raises his arm.

Ring Announcer: Here are your winners... HAKURYU... and ERIC DANE JUNIOR!

Eric pulls his arm away from the referee.

Not angrily.

He just doesn't need it raised.

He looks down at Bobby.

Then toward ringside.

The International Championship rests exactly where Bobby left it.

Eric stares at it.

John Phillips: Eric Dane Junior just pinned the International Champion!

Mark Bravo: No trick. No shortcut. No Sinja. No Hakuryu. Eric Dane Junior caught Bobby Dean and beat him.

Eric slowly gets to his feet.

He walks toward the ropes.

Looks down at the championship.

He does not reach for it.

Instead, Eric points.

At the International Championship.

Then back at Bobby.

Eric Dane Jr.: Eight days.

Bobby rolls onto his back.

He looks toward Eric.

Eric points at the belt again.

Eric Dane Jr.: Eight days, Bobby.

The smile returns.

But this time it lands differently.

Because now everybody in the building has seen what happens when Eric Dane Jr. gets his opening.

John Phillips: Earlier tonight, Bobby Dean said he finally understood that Eric Dane Junior is dangerous.

Mark Bravo: Understanding it didn't stop it.

At ringside, an official retrieves the International Championship.

Eric watches it pass.
He could reach out.
He doesn't.
The championship is handed through the ropes to Bobby Dean.
Bobby sits up.
He takes his title.
Looks at it.
Then at Eric.
Eric points toward himself.
Then makes the universal gesture around his waist.
Bobby's expression hardens.
He pulls himself to his feet.
The International Championship remains in his hands.
Eric walks backward toward the ropes.
Bobby raises the championship.
Not triumphantly.
A reminder.
It's still his.
Eric looks at it.
Then shakes his head.
Eric Dane Jr.: For now.
Bobby nods.
Bobby Dean: For now.
Eric slips through the ropes.
He backs up the ramp.
Never taking his eyes off Bobby.
But another eruption from the crowd pulls the camera away.
Yoshii and Hakuryu are STILL fighting.
They have made their way beside the entrance stage.
Yoshii throws a chop.
Hakuryu kicks the leg.
Yoshii grabs him.
Hakuryu slips free.

ROUNDHOUSE!

Yoshii stumbles.

Hakuryu charges.

Yoshii catches him!

Hakuryu immediately starts throwing elbows.

Officials pour from backstage.

One.

Two.

Four.

More.

They swarm between the two men.

Yoshii reaches over them.

Yoshii: HAKURYU!

Hakuryu tries pushing through.

The officials hold him back.

Yoshii points toward Hakuryu's waist.

Except the United States Championship isn't there.

Sinja still has it at ringside.

Yoshii points anyway.

Yoshii: NEXT WEEK!

Hakuryu stops struggling.

For just a moment.

He looks at Yoshii.

Hakuryu: Yes.

Yoshii nods.

Yoshii: End.

Hakuryu's expression goes cold.

Hakuryu: End.

The officials keep them apart.

Jed Dye finally catches up.

He gets beside Yoshii.

Jed Dye: Excellent. We have established a mutually understood timetable for violence. Now let's leave.

Yoshii ignores him.

Jed points backstage.

Jed Dye: Yoshii.

Nothing.

Jed Dye: Please?

Yoshii finally allows the officials to guide him backward.

Hakuryu watches.

Then turns his head toward ringside.

Sinja is still there.

Still holding the United States Championship.

Still exactly where Hakuryu ordered him to be.

Hakuryu extends one hand.

Sinja approaches.

He gives Hakuryu the United States Championship.

Hakuryu takes it.

Looks at Sinja.

A long pause.

Then one small nod.

Sinja bows his head.

Nothing more.

John Phillips: Sinja did exactly what Hakuryu demanded tonight.

Mark Bravo: Which means whatever Hakuryu has planned for that final opportunity in Los Angeles...

John Phillips: Sinja has earned the chance to reach it.

Hakuryu places the United States Championship over his shoulder.

He looks toward Yoshii one final time.

Yoshii is still staring back from the entrance.

The two champions-to-be opponents remain separated by officials.

Then the camera returns to the ring.

Bobby Dean stands alone.

The International Championship over his shoulder.

Eric Dane Jr. stands halfway up the ramp.

Their eyes meet again.

John Phillips: Eight days from tonight, there are no partners.

The Ring King logo appears in the corner of the screen.

John Phillips: Bobby Dean defends the International Championship against the man who just pinned him.

Mark Bravo: Hakuryu and Yoshii finally settle the United States Championship.

Quick shots begin flashing across the screen.

Emily Hightower.

Bianca Page.

The Hardcore Championship.

Chris Ross.

Madman Szalinski.

The UTA Championship.

Then Mikey Unlikely.

Mike Best.

John Phillips: Emily Hightower and Bianca Page go to war for the Hardcore Championship.

Mark Bravo: Madman Szalinski finally gets the UTA Championship match he demanded against Chris Ross.

The final graphic fills the screen.

RING KING 2026

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 26

CRYPTO.COM ARENA

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Then the tournament final appears beneath it.

MIKEY UNLIKELY

vs.

MIKE BEST

John Phillips: And after sixteen competitors, qualifiers, three rounds and tonight's semifinals...

Mark Bravo: Mikey Unlikely. Mike Best.

John Phillips: One of them becomes the 2026 Ring King.

The screen briefly returns to Eric Dane Jr.

He points toward Bobby Dean one final time.

Bobby raises the International Championship.

Neither smiles.

John Phillips: The road is over.

A final shot of the Ring King logo.

John Phillips: Next stop...

Mark Bravo: Los Angeles.

The screen fades to black.

Conclusion

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