

Victorious: 2026

Promotion: United Toughness Alliance
Date: April 18, 2026
Location: CHI Health Center — Omaha, NE

Preview

After the United Toughness Alliance's return in 2025, no promotion has been able to touch the action brought to you every week. After a Victory lap around the United States, it's time to announce to the world that the United Toughness Alliance is.... VICTORIOUS!

Results

Introduction

Segment

The screen is black.

A low, cinematic hum begins to build under the silence.

Then—

BOOM.

A wall of pyro explodes across the massive stage in red, white, and silver as the camera cuts to a sweeping aerial shot inside the CHI Health Center. The arena is overflowing with signs, camera flashes, and a sea of fans on their feet before the show has even properly begun. A giant VICTORIOUS logo fills the massive video wall, pulsing with patriotic graphics and gold trim as streams of pyro continue to fire from the stage and along the ramp. The lights sweep over the crowd while the noise inside the building rises into a deafening roar.

The camera catches fans holding signs that read: HAKURYU FEARS NO MAN ... GUNNAR IS WAR ... AMY OWNS THE EMPIRE ... MARIE BUILT THIS DIVISION ... BOBBY DEAN IS HARDCORE ... ERICA? NO. ERIC.

Another blast of pyro erupts from the stage as the music swells and the camera cuts to ringside.

John Phillips: "Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Omaha, Nebraska! Welcome to the CHI Health Center! Welcome to one of the biggest nights on the United Toughness Alliance calendar!"

Mark Bravo: "This ain't just big, John. This is HUGE. This is premium live event huge. This is the kind of card that changes careers, changes championships, changes whole damn factions."

John Phillips: "This is VICTORIOUS: 2026, and what a road it has been to get here. Since UTA roared back to life in 2025, this company has done nothing but get bigger, louder, and more dangerous every single month."

Mark Bravo: "And after tonight, they're taking that chaos worldwide. Two legs. A full world tour. The whole globe is about to find out what UTA already knows—nobody does spectacle like this place."

The camera pans slowly across the crowd again before settling on the ring, bathed in white and gold light.

John Phillips: "Championships are on the line. Pride is on the line. Careers may never be the same after tonight. We have grudges reaching back months, some reaching back years, and in one case, a clash that feels almost mythic."

Mark Bravo: "You want mythic? Let's start with the one everybody's talking about. Hakuryu gave up the Fighting

Championship—gave it up—just for the chance to chase Gunnar Van Patton and the WrestleZone Championship."

John Phillips: "A staggering decision. Hakuryu was undefeated as Fighting Champion, one of the most feared men in all of UTA, and rather than sit atop that mountain, he turned in the title and pointed directly at Gunnar Van Patton."

Mark Bravo: "Because some men don't want a mountain, John. They want Everest. Gunnar Van Patton is Everest with an eyepatch and a death wish."

John Phillips: "Gunnar comes into tonight still surrounded by questions after the injuries, the attacks, the chaos that has followed him for months. But make no mistake—when that bell rings, he is still one of the most violent champions UTA has ever produced."

Mark Bravo: "And Hakuryu doesn't care. That man didn't tap. He passed out in wars. He stared down monsters. He wants the next level, and tonight he may be trying to rip it right off Gunnar's shoulder."

A quick graphic flashes across the screen: WRESTLEZONE CHAMPIONSHIP — HAKURYU vs. GUNNAR VAN PATTON.

John Phillips: "And if that wasn't enough, we have a volatile collision for the UTA Fighting Championship as Emily Hightower defends against Valkyrie Knoxx under Fighting Championship Rules."

Mark Bravo: "I still can't get over how we got here. Valentina Blaze goes down, Amy Harrison sees an opening, and suddenly Valkyrie Knoxx is standing at the door with a title shot in her hands."

John Phillips: "But with the Hightower Clan involved, there is always a question hanging in the air. Can Valkyrie survive the pressure? Can Emily survive the pressure? Can this match even stay contained once emotions start boiling over?"

Mark Bravo: "You know what the wild part is? Emily Hightower may be the champion, but sometimes being a Hightower looks like a curse as much as a blessing. Expectations, pressure, family, interference—there's a lot coming to the ring with her tonight."

A second graphic appears: UTA FIGHTING CHAMPIONSHIP — EMILY HIGHTOWER vs. VALKYRIE KNOXX.

John Phillips: "Then there is the United States Championship, where Susanita Ybanez defends against Troy Lindz."

Mark Bravo: "And that one is dangerous in a totally different way. Susanita has fought like that title means everything, because to her it does. But Troy Lindz? Troy's not walking alone anymore. Not really. The Creed Method has gotten its hooks in deep."

John Phillips: "Troy Lindz has changed in recent months. More focused. More dangerous. More willing to embrace the edge that Eli Creed keeps trying to sharpen. Susanita Ybanez may be walking into one of the toughest title defenses of her reign."

Mark Bravo: "And Susanita ain't exactly the type to back down. That woman fights like every title defense is a street fight in disguise."

The screen flashes another graphic: UNITED STATES CHAMPIONSHIP — SUSANITA YBANEZ vs. TROY LINDZ.

John Phillips: "We also have a match drenched in history and humiliation. Amy Harrison. Marie Van Claudio. The New Empire. The Old Empire. Lumberjills at ringside. And stakes that are almost impossible to believe."

Mark Bravo: "If Amy Harrison loses, she vacates the International Championship. Gone. Over. Done. But if Marie Van Claudio loses? She becomes Amy Harrison's servant. You wanna talk humiliation? That's historic humiliation."

John Phillips: "This rivalry has turned deeply personal. Marie Van Claudio is one of the defining women in UTA history. Amy Harrison has spent months trying to prove that this era belongs to her, not to the legends who built the foundation."

Mark Bravo: "And now they're putting that entire argument into one match. One final humiliation. One final statement. One final chance to either protect the old legacy or hand the keys to the new one."

The graphic fills the screen: LUMBERJILL MATCH — SERVITUDE vs. CHAMPIONSHIP — AMY HARRISON vs. MARIE VAN CLAUDIO.

John Phillips: "Plus, the UTA Champion Chris Ross joins forces with Samuel Scythe and a partner yet to be revealed against Maxwell Jett, Jacoby Jacobs, and Darran Darrington after everything exploded on Victory."

Mark Bravo: "That match is a powder keg. Chris Ross and Samuel Scythe side by side is enough attitude to power the whole state of Nebraska."

John Phillips: "And on the other side, Maxwell Jett, Jacoby Jacobs, and Darran Darrington are not exactly known for restraint. We could see the entire building come apart when those six enter the same orbit."

A new graphic appears: CHRIS ROSS / SAMUEL SCYTHE / TBD vs. MAXWELL JETT / JACOBY JACOBS / DARRAN DARRINGTON.

John Phillips: "Madman Szalinski returns to the ring tonight against Silas Grimm in a match with emotional undertones and violent possibilities."

Mark Bravo: "Madman is a Hall of Famer, a legend, a complete lunatic, and depending who you ask, maybe the only guy wild enough to walk straight into Silas Grimm smiling."

John Phillips: "Silas Grimm has left destruction everywhere he has gone. He took away El Fantasma. He has thrived in the shadows left behind by other people's pain. Tonight Madman Szalinski gets the chance to answer that in the ring."

Graphic: SILAS GRIMM vs. MADMAN SZALINSKI.

John Phillips: "And we will kick off championship drama in unforgettable fashion when Bobby Dean puts his totally real, totally active Hardcore Championship on the line against Eric Dane Jr. in a ladder match."

Mark Bravo: "I love that you had to say it like that."

John Phillips: "Because that is how Bobby Dean presents it."

Mark Bravo: "Listen, Hall of Fame or not, Bobby Dean is still Bobby Dean. But Eric Dane Jr.? That man has spent the better part of his UTA run demanding the spotlight, stealing the spotlight, and throwing a fit when somebody else gets it first."

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. believes this is his night. Bobby Dean believes his brand of chaos can still carry him to one more unforgettable moment. With ladders involved, reason may not survive the opening bell."

Graphic: HARDCORE CHAMPIONSHIP LADDER MATCH — BOBBY DEAN vs. ERIC DANE JR..

The camera cuts to a wide shot of the crowd again. The audience is still standing, buzzing, pointing toward the stage, waiting for the first entrance of the night.

Mark Bravo: "This is what I love, John. You can feel it. Nobody is sitting. Nobody is comfortable. Everybody knows something insane is about to happen."

John Phillips: "That is the atmosphere of a truly major event. VICTORIOUS is not just another stop on the road. It is a destination. It is a statement. And after tonight, the road gets even bigger as UTA launches into its two-leg world tour."

Mark Bravo: "So if you're on that roster, you want momentum right now. You want gold right now. You want headlines right now. Because after tonight, this whole company goes global in a way that changes everything."

John Phillips: "The lights are ready. The ladders are waiting. Omaha is on its feet. VICTORIOUS: 2026 begins right

now!"

The music rises again as the camera swings toward the massive stage, the VICTORIOUS logo blazing across the tron. The crowd roars as the broadcast prepares for the first entrance of the evening.

John Phillips: "It is time for our opening contest!"

Eric Dane Jr. vs Bobby Dean

Match

The camera opens on the Hardcore Championship hanging high above the ring.

It sways ever so slightly beneath the bright white lights of the CHI Health Center, gold catching every shimmer from the rafters as the crowd in Omaha roars beneath it. The shot lingers there for a long moment, letting the scale of the moment breathe. The ladders below are already in place like silent threats—one bridged near the barricade, one folded at ringside against the apron, another laid flat near the timekeeper's area, and a taller silver ladder standing ominously just outside the ring like a promise of pain to come.

John Phillips: "There it is. Suspended above the ring. The Hardcore Championship, according to Bobby Dean, still very much real and very much active."

Mark Bravo: "And in Bobby's heart, John, it may be the most important title in professional wrestling."

John Phillips: "Tonight, jokes aside, it hangs over a ladder match on one of the grandest stages UTA has to offer."

Mark Bravo: "That's the dangerous part. Bobby Dean may be a comedy character to most people, but he is not walking into this thinking it's a joke. Eric Dane Jr. may be laughing at him on the outside... but Bobby is taking this dead serious."

The camera slowly begins to pan outward. The title remains centered for a beat before the frame widens and the full enormity of the arena comes into view. Thousands of fans are on their feet, camera flashes popping all over the lower bowl. The giant VICTORIOUS set glows in patriotic colors at the far end of the building, while the ladders around ringside complete a battlefield that already looks dangerous before either man has even entered.

John Phillips: "Ladders surrounding the ring. A championship dangling overhead. And knowing Eric Dane Jr., he's going to treat this like a coronation."

Mark Bravo: "Because that idiot thinks every room he walks into is already his."

The lights dim slightly.

Then a familiar beat hits.

Nas' "Made You Look" blasts through the building.

The crowd immediately erupts into a wave of loud boos as the stage explodes in gold and white light. The camera cuts to the entrance where a sharp spotlight lands dead center at the top of the ramp.

And there he is.

Eric Dane Jr. steps out like the entire event has been held solely to celebrate his arrival.

He is draped in a sparkling robe that catches every bit of light from the stage and sends it dancing across the camera lens. Silver. White. Flashing hints of gold. Sequins and arrogance woven together into one impossibly smug presentation. A pair of dark sunglasses hide his eyes, but the smirk curling across his face says more than enough. He pauses beneath the spotlight and slowly spreads his arms, not to welcome the fans, but to command their attention.

John Phillips: "And here comes Eric Dane Jr."

Mark Bravo: "Of course he had to dress like a million-dollar insult."

John Phillips: "You wanted grand? Eric Dane Jr. always wants grand. He wants attention. He wants cameras. He wants every set of eyes in this building fixed directly on him."

Mark Bravo: "And the sick part is... for better or worse, they are."

Dane does not move right away. He lets the music breathe. Lets the boos wash over him. Lets the camera take in every ridiculous inch of him. Then he slowly turns in place, showing off the robe from every angle like a man convinced the arena should be grateful he showed up at all.

He points to himself with both hands, then out into the crowd, then back at himself again.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Yeah... look at me."

The boos grow even louder.

John Phillips: "This is who Eric Dane Jr. is. An egotist. A spotlight thief. A man who has spent weeks turning this entire Bobby Dean situation into his own personal stage play."

Mark Bravo: "Because if Bobby Dean's living in a cartoon, Eric Dane Jr. thinks he's living in a documentary about greatness."

Dane starts down the ramp in slow motion, every step deliberate, every movement exaggerated. He doesn't hurry. He glides. One hand brushes the front of his robe while the other occasionally lifts to acknowledge the hard camera or dismiss the fans with a flick of the wrist. He does not offer a single hand slap. He does not care about a single face in the crowd. But he absolutely expects every one of them to be looking at him.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. made this match bigger by attaching his ego to it. Weeks of mocking Bobby Dean. Weeks of trying to turn an old retired title into something he could use for his own profile."

Mark Bravo: "And let's be honest, he picked Bobby because he thinks this is easy. He thinks Bobby Dean is a punchline, a prop, a guy he can climb over on his way to another headline."

John Phillips: "That may be how Eric sees it. But the danger tonight is that ladders do not care who the joke is."

He reaches ringside and stops dead.

For the first time, Eric's eyes drop from himself to the weapons of the environment around him. The camera follows as he slowly circles the ring, taking inventory. A ladder laid near the barricade. Another leaned beside the steps. One folded under the bottom rope halfway into the ring. He studies them all with that same smug, calculating expression, as though he is already storyboarding the best possible angles for Bobby Dean's destruction.

Mark Bravo: "Now that right there I actually believe. He's looking at those ladders like a guy trying to decide which one would make the prettiest wreck."

John Phillips: "There is strategy in a ladder match, and for all of Eric Dane Jr.'s arrogance, you cannot ignore that he is dangerous when he starts getting creative."

Dane crouches near one ladder and taps it with the back of his hand. He glances up toward the title hanging above the ring and smirks again. Then he rises, takes two steps toward the apron, and pauses to look around once more—as if making sure every camera in the building is still right where it belongs.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Try not to blink, Omaha."

He makes his way up the steel steps slowly, with exaggerated dignity. One hand grips the top rope as he steps onto the apron. He wipes the sole of one boot against the edge, then the other, like the ring itself has been blessed by his arrival. Then he ducks through the ropes and steps into the center of the ring.

He turns immediately toward the ring announcer and shrugs the sparkled robe from his shoulders with theatrical flair. The attendant reaches for it and Eric hands it off without even looking at him, eyes already moving to the nearest camera.

Mark Bravo: "You know he practiced that in a mirror."

John Phillips: "Probably more than once."

Now in his silver trunks with the stars catching under the arena lights, wrist tape perfect, hair in place, Eric rolls his shoulders and saunters toward the nearest corner. He steps onto the middle turnbuckle first, then climbs higher, rising up with all the self-importance in the world. He plants one boot steady on the top rope support, lifts one arm high into the air, and stares out over the crowd like a man convinced he is already champion.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. soaking in the moment here at Victorious."

Mark Bravo: "He's not soaking it in, John. He's trying to own it."

The camera catches the shot from below—Eric silhouetted against the huge VICTORIOUS graphics, one arm raised, sunglasses still on, chin tilted high while the crowd rains boos down on him from every direction.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. believes this is the beginning of another title chapter in his career."

Mark Bravo: "And in about ten minutes, he may be finding out the hard way that Bobby Dean didn't come here to be a chapter. Bobby Dean came here to defend his world."

Dane hops down from the buckle and begins pacing the ring, jawing toward the hard camera and pointing once again up at the Hardcore Championship hanging high above him.

The crowd continues to boo as he slowly removes the sunglasses and holds them in one hand, a smug grin still locked on his face.

His music begins to fade.

And the arena waits for Bobby Dean.

The arena goes completely black.

For a moment, there is nothing.

No music. No movement. No sound beyond the low murmur of anticipation rolling through the CHI Health Center.

Then a single spotlight snaps on at the top of the stage.

And there he is.

Bobby Dean stands in the center of the light with both arms raised high above his head, soaking in the moment like a conquering hero returning home. Draped around his enormous frame is a sparkly blue robe that, from a distance, almost passes for proper entrance gear...

...until the camera gets a little closer.

Because this is very clearly less "grand wrestling robe" and much more "bath robe a man absolutely should not be wearing in public."

The bedazzled sequins do their best.

The robe itself does not.

Mark Bravo: "Oh my God."

John Phillips: "Well... Bobby Dean certainly understood the assignment."

Mark Bravo: "No, he understood part of the assignment. He heard 'sparkly robe' and stopped listening."

Bobby keeps his arms up, chin tilted back, chest puffed out, basking in what at first sounds like a swelling chorus of "BOB-BY! BOB-BY! BOB-BY!"

The chant is suspiciously perfect at first.

A little too clean. A little too immediate.

Piped in.

But then something wonderful happens.

The crowd in Omaha picks it up for real.

Suddenly the fake chant turns into a genuine one, louder and fuller and alive in a way no soundboard ever could. Thousands of fans begin shouting his name, many laughing, many cheering, many simply buying into the absurd magic of the moment as Bobby Dean beams beneath the spotlight like this is the greatest ovation of his life.

John Phillips: "Listen to this crowd!"

Mark Bravo: "You know what? I hate how much I love this."

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean is a beloved figure for a reason. Hall of Fame weekend, this so-called Hardcore Championship, this impossible title defense on a major stage... somewhere along the line, this became real to these people."

Mark Bravo: "It became real to Bobby a long time ago. That's the dangerous part."

The arena lights suddenly rise in full.

And right on cue, Joe Esposito's "You're the Best Around" blasts through the speakers.

The place erupts.

Bobby Dean throws both arms up again and nods to himself like a man confirming what he already knew—that yes, this is indeed his night.

John Phillips: "And there is the music! Bobby Dean making his entrance for this Hardcore Championship ladder match!"

Mark Bravo: "I cannot believe this is a thing we are saying on a premium live event."

Bobby starts forward with all the confidence in the world.

One step.

Two steps.

Three.

Then he stops.

Completely stops.

His chest heaves. His expression changes. One hand goes to his hip while the other rises slowly into the air, index finger extended, politely asking for a moment as he tries to catch his breath beneath the stage lights.

Mark Bravo: "No."

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean may have underestimated the walk."

Mark Bravo: "The walk? He just got to the intro!"

Bobby nods to himself a few times, breathing hard, then turns and hurries as best he can back toward the curtain, disappearing behind it while the music continues to play.

The crowd buzzes in confusion.

Eric Dane Jr., standing in the ring, lowers his sunglasses just enough to stare toward the stage in complete disbelief.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You have got to be kidding me."

John Phillips: "Well now what?"

Mark Bravo: "Honestly? With Bobby Dean? Could be anything."

There is a brief pause.

Then from somewhere behind the curtain—

HONK! HONK!

The crowd explodes.

Mark Bravo: "THERE it is!"

John Phillips: "Of course!"

Bobby Dean comes flying out from the back on his mobility scooter, now moving with a level of speed and confidence that had been entirely absent three seconds earlier. His blue sparkly bath robe flaps behind him like a cape as he zooms onto the stage, one hand on the handlebars and the other waving enthusiastically to the crowd.

HONK! HONK!

The fans roar with laughter and applause as Bobby tears down the ramp like he's leading a parade.

John Phillips: "And now Bobby Dean is mobile!"

Mark Bravo: "This is his bog event entrance. Don't take this from him."

Inside the ring, Eric Dane Jr. is no longer posing. He stands with his hands on his hips, jaw hanging open in offended disbelief as Bobby races toward ringside.

Bobby swings wide and begins circling the ring on the scooter, honking the horn repeatedly, acknowledging every side of the arena like a politician working a campaign route.

Bobby Dean: "WOOO! LOOK AT THIS! LOOK AT ALL THESE PEOPLE!"

Mark Bravo: "He is absolutely loving this."

John Phillips: "He truly is. And for all the comedy in this presentation, you cannot deny that Bobby Dean believes tonight matters."

Mark Bravo: "That robe, that title, this entrance, the Hall of Fame weekend glow—to Bobby Dean, this is one hundred percent real."

Bobby makes it around the far side of the ring and spots Eric glaring down at him from inside the ropes.

He grins even bigger and throws a cheerful wave.

Bobby Dean: "HI ERIC!"

HONK! HONK!

Eric Dane Jr.: "Stop honking at me!"

John Phillips: "And Eric Dane Jr. wants absolutely nothing to do with this spectacle."

Mark Bravo: "Because for once, somebody else is stealing the spotlight."

Bobby keeps waving at Eric, so focused on his opponent that he never notices the steel ring steps directly in front of him.

And then—

CLANG!

The scooter crashes into the steps.

Bobby lurches forward with a startled yelp as the front wheel jams against the steel. The crowd erupts in a mixture of gasps and laughter while Eric physically recoils in the ring, throwing his hands up in disgust.

Mark Bravo: "There it is!"

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean just drove straight into the ring steps!"

Mark Bravo: "And somehow I still don't think that's the worst vehicle-related thing we're gonna see tonight!"

Bobby blinks a few times, shakes it off, then pats the scooter like he's apologizing to it more than himself.

Bobby Dean: "You're okay. I'm okay. We're okay."

The audience cheers the recovery.

With some effort, Bobby eases himself off the scooter and steadies his robe. He adjusts the collar, straightens up as proudly as he can, and then begins the slower, more difficult process of making his way toward the apron.

John Phillips: "And now Bobby Dean has to transition from the scooter to the ring, and that may be easier said than done."

Mark Bravo: "John, I ask this seriously... how in the hell is this man supposed to win a ladder match?"

John Phillips: "That is the question hanging over all of this. The title isn't won by pinfall or submission. You have to climb."

Mark Bravo: "Exactly. You have to climb. There is no world where Bobby Dean is scampering up a ladder like some kind of mountain goat."

John Phillips: "And yet here he is. After weeks of bizarre encounters, from backstage segments to scooter interruptions to Eric Dane Jr. manipulating this whole situation into a ladder match, Bobby Dean still insisted on taking this challenge."

Mark Bravo: "Because he thinks he's defending his legacy. That old Hardcore Championship may be retired to everybody else, but to Bobby Dean it never stopped meaning something."

Bobby reaches the apron and grabs hold of the bottom rope. The crowd begins cheering him on as he carefully, awkwardly, and determinedly works his way onto the apron and through the ropes.

It is not graceful.

It is not athletic.

But it is sincere.

John Phillips: "And listen to this crowd willing him forward!"

Mark Bravo: "That's the craziest part. They know this is ridiculous... but they want to believe anyway."

Bobby finally steps fully into the ring and stands upright. He throws both arms out wide again, head tilted back, soaking in the ovation as the crowd gives him another huge reaction.

Across the ring, Eric Dane Jr. can only stare at him with a mixture of annoyance, disbelief, and maybe the slightest trace of concern.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean is in the ring, and now this ladder match is no longer an idea. It is happening."

Mark Bravo: "I still can't get past the climbing part. There is no chance Bobby can actually climb a ladder... is there?"

John Phillips: "It seems impossible."

Mark Bravo: "And yet tonight already feels like the kind of night where impossible might try to get over."

Bobby turns in a slow circle, taking in every side of the arena, slapping his chest once and then pointing up toward the Hardcore Championship hanging high above the ring.

The camera catches the title overhead.

Then Bobby below it.

Then Eric Dane Jr. glaring from across the ring.

The stage is set.

The camera settles into a wide shot of the ring.

Above it all, the Hardcore Championship hangs from its cable under the arena lights, gently swaying over the center of the canvas like a taunt. Below it stand two men who could not possibly feel more different about the task in front of them.

On one side of the ring, Bobby Dean is still feeding off the crowd, chest rising and falling, face lit up with pure joy as he points toward the title and nods to himself like this is the exact moment he has imagined for weeks. He claps his hands once, twice, then rubs them together and bounces lightly on the balls of his feet as much as he is physically able.

John Phillips: "There's the visual right there. The championship overhead. Bobby Dean underneath it. Eric Dane Jr. across from him. And suddenly all of the jokes, all of the backstage chaos, all of the absurdity of this rivalry... it all leads here."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and now the funny part gets dangerous."

The camera cuts to Bobby in a medium close-up. His eyes go up to the belt again. He smiles wide. He looks like a man seeing an old friend hanging just out of reach.

Bobby Dean: "Look at that."

He points up with both hands, almost childlike in his excitement.

Bobby Dean: "Still beautiful."

John Phillips: "You can say whatever you want about Bobby Dean, but there is no faking that emotion. To him, that title is not a prop. It is not nostalgia. It is part of him."

Mark Bravo: "That's why this thing is so weirdly compelling. Bobby Dean isn't in there for irony. He's in there because he believes he is the defending Hardcore Champion. Full stop."

Across the ring, Eric Dane Jr. slowly removes the last trace of amusement from his face and replaces it with something colder. He rolls his neck once, cracks his knuckles, and stares up at the championship with a smirk that borders on insult. He doesn't see history hanging there. He sees a shortcut to another moment with his name on it.

John Phillips: "And on the other side, Eric Dane Jr. has made it clear exactly what he thinks this is."

Mark Bravo: "Light work."

John Phillips: "A spectacle he can win. A legend he can embarrass. A bizarre old championship he can grab and then spin into another chapter of the Eric Dane Jr. story."

Mark Bravo: "That kid thinks tonight is beneath him and made for him at the same time. Which is honestly the most Eric Dane Jr. thing imaginable."

Dane takes a few slow steps toward center ring, never taking his eyes off Bobby. He gestures once up toward the title, then back down toward himself.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Enjoy the view, Bobb-o. That's the closest you're gettin'."

The crowd boos immediately.

Bobby, instead of looking offended, just keeps smiling. He points at himself with both thumbs.

Bobby Dean: "I've had it before!"

Mark Bravo: "And there's the confidence."

John Phillips: "As strange as it sounds, Bobby Dean may be the only man in this match who isn't bluffing about what this championship means."

Eric chuckles under his breath and slowly paces left, circling a few steps as though already sizing up where he wants to land the first humiliation. Bobby turns with him, slower, more deliberate, making sure he keeps Eric in front of him while occasionally glancing up at the title again.

The hard camera catches all three points in one shot—Eric, Bobby, and the championship hanging over both men.

John Phillips: "That title changes everything. In a normal match, Bobby Dean might be able to survive, maybe even outlast a few moments. But this is not about surviving. It is not about pinning shoulders to the mat. You must climb. You must reach. You must bring that belt down."

Mark Bravo: "And that's what makes Eric so smug right now. In his head, he already sees the ending. He already sees Bobby out of breath, laid out, while he climbs like he's ascending Mount Ego."

Bobby suddenly motions upward again and nods toward the belt.

Bobby Dean: "Still got plenty left in me, baby."

Eric laughs louder this time, the kind of laugh designed to be heard by everyone.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You got plenty left in catering, maybe."

The boos rain down harder.

Mark Bravo: "Okay, that was mean."

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. has never confused cruelty with charisma."

Bobby's smile fades just a little. Not gone. Just tightened. The first real sign that beneath the robe, beneath the chants, beneath the scooter and the absurdity, there is actual pride at stake here.

He pats his own chest once, then points directly across the ring at Eric.

Bobby Dean: "I came to fight."

John Phillips: "Listen to that. For all the laughter, for all the pageantry, Bobby Dean is centered right now. This matters

to him."

Mark Bravo: "And maybe that's the one thing Eric doesn't fully get. He sees a joke. Bobby sees one of the biggest nights of his life."

Eric steps forward again, now close enough that the gap between them feels loaded. He tilts his head, looking Bobby up and down like a man trying to figure out whether to be insulted or entertained.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Fight?"

He points up to the championship.

Eric Dane Jr.: "This ain't a fight, Bobby. This is me climbing a ladder and taking your little fantasy down with me."

Bobby follows Eric's finger up to the title, and the crowd starts to buzz louder. The camera moves low and catches the belt glimmering above both their heads.

John Phillips: "The stakes may be different for each man, but make no mistake, they are enormous on both sides."

Mark Bravo: "For Bobby Dean, it's legacy. Hall of Fame glow. Memory. Pride. For Eric Dane Jr., it's image. It's validation. It's proving he can turn even this into an Eric Dane Jr. moment."

Bobby slowly takes one step forward, then another, closing more of the distance than anyone might have expected. He looks up at Eric, breathing hard but steady, the earlier grin now mixed with determination.

Bobby Dean: "Then you better climb fast."

The crowd pops.

Mark Bravo: "Okay! Bobby came with one!"

John Phillips: "And Eric Dane Jr. didn't expect that."

Eric's expression twitches just slightly, not enough to lose his confidence, but enough to show he did not expect Bobby Dean to answer him with anything resembling bite. He takes another step in, nearly nose-to-nose now, though with Bobby shorter and broader the visual comes off more like a bully trying to tower over a man who simply refuses to move.

The arena noise grows. The title continues to sway above them.

John Phillips: "Two men in the ring. The championship overhead. One sees opportunity. One sees responsibility. And somewhere between those two mindsets, this thing is about to ignite."

Mark Bravo: "Bobby's excited. Eric's arrogant. The title is hanging there like destiny. And somehow, against all reason, this match suddenly feels important."

Bobby glances up one more time at the Hardcore Championship.

Eric glances up too.

Then both men look back at each other.

The laughter has mostly faded now.

What remains is anticipation.

The camera lingers on the shot.

The title. The ring. Bobby Dean. Eric Dane Jr.

And the sense that all of this is one second away from exploding.

John Phillips: "And there's the bell!"

Mark Bravo: "Here we go! Ladder match! Hardcore Championship hanging high above the ring! Eric Dane Jr. and Bobby Dean officially underway at Victorious!"

DING DING DING!

The bell sounds and for a split second neither man moves.

The crowd rises a little louder as the title sways overhead and the weight of the match finally settles in. Eric Dane Jr. stands loose and smug, shoulders rolled, a smirk on his face like he's been gifted an easy paycheck. Bobby Dean, by contrast, looks almost overwhelmed with excitement, eyes wide, chest heaving, bouncing in place as much as his body allows while he stares across the ring like this is the biggest fight of his life.

John Phillips: "And look at the contrast immediately. Eric Dane Jr. looks like a man stepping into a showcase. Bobby Dean looks like a man stepping into destiny."

Mark Bravo: "That's because for Bobby, this is destiny. For Eric, this is Tuesday with pyro."

Eric slowly raises a hand and motions for Bobby to calm down, talking to him like a condescending older brother who already thinks he knows how the night ends.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Alright, Bobb-o. Nice and easy now. Don't do anything that gets you winded before I embarrass you."

The crowd boos. Bobby blinks once, then grins and points up at the title.

Bobby Dean: "I'm gonna get that belt!"

Mark Bravo: "I swear to God, he means every word."

John Phillips: "He absolutely does."

Bobby suddenly surges forward with surprising enthusiasm, arms out, trying to close distance before Eric can keep monologuing. Eric's eyes widen for half a beat, and he immediately backpedals toward the ropes, avoiding contact as Bobby keeps coming.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Whoa! Whoa! No need to sprint, big man!"

Bobby lunges again, and Eric slips to the side just in time, making Bobby turn hard and grab the top rope to stop his own momentum.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean came out with far more urgency than Eric expected!"

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because Eric thought he was opening a school play, not a ladder match!"

Eric chuckles nervously and pats his own chest like none of that mattered, but the pace of his breathing has changed just enough to show that Bobby caught him off guard. Bobby points at him and claps once, hyping himself up.

Bobby Dean: "C'mere!"

Eric rolls his eyes and steps in again, this time much more cautious. He circles Bobby, hands low, keeping just out of reach while glancing occasionally at the ladders around ringside like he's deciding whether to end this quickly or stylishly.

John Phillips: "You can see Eric Dane Jr. recalculating now."

Mark Bravo: "Because if Bobby gets his hands on him early, this stops being funny real quick."

Eric darts in suddenly with a sharp kick to the thigh.

Then another.

Then a slapping little boot to the outside of the knee before bouncing backward out of range.

Eric Dane Jr.: "That's how adults do it."

John Phillips: "Smart strategy from Eric Dane Jr. Don't let Bobby tie him up, don't let Bobby lean on him, keep him moving."

Mark Bravo: "And if possible, keep a safe distance from the gravitational pull."

Bobby grimaces at the leg kick, but instead of getting discouraged, he charges again with a big looping arm swing that looks half clothesline, half hug, and all bad news if it connects. Eric ducks under it and spins behind Bobby, planting both hands on his back and shoving him forward toward the ropes.

Bobby stumbles, catches himself, turns back around—

and Eric drills him with a dropkick to the chest.

Bobby rocks backward but does not go down.

John Phillips: "He didn't budge!"

Mark Bravo: "Okay, Eric did not love that!"

Eric stares in disbelief for a half-second, then rushes in with a second dropkick. This one lands higher, under the chin and across the upper chest, and Bobby finally staggers back into the corner, grabbing the ropes to steady himself as the crowd cheers the survival.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Stay down! Work with me here!"

Bobby shakes his head and puffs his cheeks out, looking insulted more than hurt. Eric rushes in again, trying to keep momentum, but Bobby suddenly steps out of the corner and throws both arms forward, smothering Eric in a massive body-to-body clinch.

John Phillips: "Bobby got him!"

Mark Bravo: "OH NO! HE CAUGHT HIM!"

Eric's face changes instantly from smug annoyance to genuine panic.

Eric Dane Jr.: "No! No no no no—"

Bobby squeezes tight and starts grinding Eric backward, using sheer bulk and momentum to mash him into the turnbuckles. Eric flails, trying to pry free, but Bobby keeps him pinned there with all his weight, face lit up with determination while the crowd howls.

Bobby Dean: "I gotcha now!"

John Phillips: "That is exactly what Eric Dane Jr. needed to avoid! Bobby Dean has him trapped in the corner!"

Mark Bravo: "That is not chain wrestling, John! That is being buried alive in sparkle and bathrobe lint!"

Eric finally manages to drive a few desperate elbows into the side of Bobby's head. One. Two. Three. That loosens the grip just enough for him to slip out to the side. He stumbles away, hair disheveled, breathing hard, and immediately starts wiping at his chest and shoulders like Bobby's very existence offended his entire bloodline.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Oh my God! What even was that?!"

Bobby throws his arms up and the crowd roars again.

Bobby Dean: "Defense!"

Mark Bravo: "Defense?!"

John Phillips: "I... suppose in a way, yes."

Eric shakes his head furiously and bails under the bottom rope to the floor, immediately creating distance. He paces at ringside, running a hand through his hair while glaring up at Bobby, who stands in the ring pointing triumphantly at himself and then up at the Hardcore Championship hanging overhead.

John Phillips: "And now Eric Dane Jr. retreats to the floor."

Mark Bravo: "Smart move. Laugh all you want, but Bobby Dean just proved that if he gets a hold of you, your night changes."

Eric reaches for the nearest ladder leaning against the barricade and drags it out with both hands, metal scraping loudly against the floor. The crowd buzzes instantly as he folds it open halfway, then stops and looks back into the ring with a vicious little smile.

John Phillips: "And now the first ladder enters the equation."

Mark Bravo: "See, this is where Eric gets dangerous. He stops trying to wrestle and starts trying to create a highlight."

Bobby sees the ladder and his expression shifts. The joy is still there, but now there's caution too. He steps closer to the ropes, hands out, watching Eric carefully. Eric lifts the ladder chest-high and starts stalking toward the ring like a hunter with a steel trap in his arms.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Alright, Bobb-o. Let's make history."

Bobby takes one step back.

Eric slides the ladder into the ring.

It skids across the canvas toward Bobby's legs—

Bobby awkwardly hops over one side of it, barely clearing the metal as the crowd gasps and then cheers the escape.

John Phillips: "Bobby avoided it!"

Mark Bravo: "That was not elegant, but it was effective!"

Eric slides in after the ladder and pops to his feet quickly, expecting Bobby to still be tangled up. Instead Bobby is upright and coming at him again, face determined, arms wide.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Seriously?!"

Eric snatches the ladder by one side and jabs the top of it forward like a spear, driving the edge into Bobby's midsection. Bobby doubles over with a groan, and Eric follows immediately by snapping a kick into the side of the ladder, sandwiching the metal into Bobby's stomach and knocking the bigger man backward into the ropes.

John Phillips: "Ladder right to the body!"

Mark Bravo: "And that'll stop momentum every time."

Bobby leans against the ropes, sucking wind, while Eric finally starts to look comfortable. He smirks, brushes imaginary dust off his own chest, and grabs the ladder with both hands again. This time he lifts it high and starts to set it upright in the center of the ring, glancing up to the title with growing confidence.

John Phillips: "And now Eric Dane Jr. wasting no time. He may be thinking early climb."

Mark Bravo: "Because in his mind, this is exactly how it was supposed to go. Bobby has a moment, everybody laughs, then Eric climbs and steals the scene."

Eric kicks the legs of the ladder into place and begins to open it fully.

Behind him, Bobby Dean is still hunched over by the ropes, breathing hard, one hand on his stomach.

But he is also looking up.

Not at Eric.

At the title.

And then back at the ladder.

The crowd starts to buzz again as Bobby pushes himself upright, still hurting, still breathing hard, but still very much in this fight.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. may think this is light work, but Bobby Dean is not fading away."

Mark Bravo: "No. He's hurt, he's winded, he probably shouldn't be in a ladder match in the first place... and he still looks like he believes."

Eric plants a foot on the first rung and looks skyward, fingertips already reaching up as if the title is waiting for him.

Bobby takes a step forward from the ropes.

The crowd rises.

And the first true climb of the match is about to begin.

Eric Dane Jr. plants his second foot on the ladder and starts upward with quick, confident steps, one hand on each side rail, his eyes fixed on the Hardcore Championship hanging above him.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. already on the climb!"

Mark Bravo: "This is exactly what Bobby could not allow! If Eric gets a clean path this thing might be over before Bobby ever finds a rhythm!"

The crowd volume rises sharply as Eric reaches the third rung, then the fourth. He glances down once over his shoulder and sees Bobby Dean lumbering forward from behind, still holding his midsection, still hurting, but coming all the same.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Too slow, Bobb-o!"

Eric turns his attention back upward and climbs one rung higher, extending a hand toward the title—

but the fingertips are nowhere near it yet.

John Phillips: "Not high enough!"

Mark Bravo: "That's the thing about a ladder match. You can be in control, but if you misjudge the climb even a little, you leave yourself hanging out there."

Bobby Dean reaches the base of the ladder and wraps both arms around it like a man trying to uproot a tree. Eric's face changes instantly.

Eric Dane Jr.: "No no no! Don't you—"

Bobby heaves forward.

The ladder rocks violently.

Eric flails with both arms, hugging the top of the ladder for dear life as the crowd erupts.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean shaking the ladder!"

Mark Bravo: "That works too! You don't have to climb it if you can turn the guy on top into a human maraca!"

Bobby shakes it again. Harder this time.

Eric bounces and nearly loses a foot from the rung, scrambling to steady himself.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Stop touching my ladder!"

Bobby Dean: "Get down!"

With a roar from the crowd behind him, Bobby gives one more giant shove. The ladder tips just enough off center that Eric has no choice but to leap off before the whole structure comes down on top of him.

He jumps—

and lands on his feet.

For a split second he looks proud of himself.

Then Bobby Dean falls backward into the ladder and the top of it clips Eric right in the face.

Mark Bravo: "OH!"

John Phillips: "Eric just got blasted!"

Eric stumbles backward clutching his mouth and nose, spinning once before dropping to a knee near the ropes while the crowd howls with laughter and cheers. Bobby, meanwhile, is also down on the canvas, the effort of shaking the ladder having taken almost as much out of him as the attack itself.

John Phillips: "Neither man graceful there, but Bobby Dean absolutely succeeded in stopping that climb."

Mark Bravo: "And somehow Bobby turned raw determination into offense again."

Bobby rolls onto one side, breathing heavily, then pushes himself back up to a seated position. Eric is already glaring at him through his fingers, checking his lip for blood and finding just enough to offend him.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You bleeding idiot!"

Bobby Dean: "You're the one who was up there!"

Mark Bravo: "Strong argument from Bobby."

Bobby gets one hand on the ladder and starts dragging it around on the mat, not with any real plan, but with the instinctive logic of a man who knows the ladder is important and therefore wants it closer to him than Eric. The metal screeches loudly as he pulls it toward the ropes.

John Phillips: "And now Bobby Dean in control of the ladder!"

Mark Bravo: "Control might be generous, John. He has custody of it."

Eric surges back to his feet and charges, anger overriding caution. He sprints in and hammers Bobby across the back with a forearm, then another, then a kick to the side of the knee.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. fighting with frustration now!"

Mark Bravo: "Because the longer this match goes, the more chances Bobby has to do something weird and effective."

Bobby grunts with each shot, finally letting go of the ladder to turn and face Eric. Dane fires a sharp chop across the chest, then another. The sounds crack through the ring, but Bobby only seems to get madder. He reaches forward with both hands again, trying to snatch Eric up.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Nope!"

Eric ducks out to the side and blasts Bobby with a chop block from behind, taking out the back of the knee. Bobby drops to one leg near the ladder and Eric immediately grabs the top half of it, slamming the side rail down across Bobby's shoulders.

John Phillips: "Ladder to the upper back!"

Mark Bravo: "Now that one hurt."

Bobby groans and spills onto all fours. Eric smirks now, the panic fully gone, replaced by his familiar air of self-satisfaction. He stands over Bobby, one boot pressed against the lower rung of the ladder.

Eric Dane Jr.: "There. That's better. Stay down, let the star work."

He drags the ladder up by the side rails, walks it to the corner, and wedges it horizontally between the middle rope and the turnbuckles so it juts out like a steel barricade. The crowd buzzes nervously at the sight of it.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. setting a trap in the corner."

Mark Bravo: "And this is where his creativity becomes a problem. He may be arrogant, but the kid knows how to turn a bad idea into a dangerous one."

Eric turns back toward Bobby and motions with both hands.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Get up, Hall of Famer. Let's make a memory."

Bobby Dean is on one knee now, one hand on the mat, the other pressed to his back. He looks up and sees Eric beckoning him forward, then sees the ladder jammed in the corner behind Eric. Bobby's face changes. For one of the first times all night, he looks wary.

John Phillips: "Bobby sees it."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and for good reason."

Eric rushes in, grabbing Bobby by the arm and trying to haul him all the way up. It takes effort. More than Eric expected. He grits his teeth and keeps pulling, trying to drag Bobby toward the corner.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Move! Come on!"

Bobby stumbles forward once. Then again. Then plants his feet.

John Phillips: "Bobby's resisting!"

Eric yanks harder, trying to Irish whip him toward the wedged ladder—
but Bobby doesn't go.

Instead Bobby yanks back.

Eric, unprepared for the counter-pull, lurches forward right into Bobby's body.

Mark Bravo: "Uh oh."

Bobby wraps both arms around Eric again.

Bobby Dean: "Gotcha."

John Phillips: "Bobby caught him a second time!"

The crowd roars as Bobby pivots with all the force he can generate and simply hurls Eric backward across the ring in a rough, awkward belly-to-belly toss. It is not pretty. It is not technical.

It is extremely effective.

Eric flies backward and crashes spine-first into the ladder wedged in the corner.

CLANG!

Mark Bravo: "OOOOOH!"

John Phillips: "Right into the steel!"

The ladder dislodges from the ropes and collapses around Eric as he falls to the mat in a heap, limbs tangled in metal, boots kicking as he tries to free himself. The audience is on its feet now, roaring for Bobby Dean, who looks almost surprised at how well that worked.

Bobby Dean: "Oh wow."

Mark Bravo: "That was the most accidental great offense I've ever seen!"

John Phillips: "Call it what you want, Bobby Dean just turned the trap around on Eric Dane Jr.!"

Bobby points at Eric, then at himself, then at the crowd, feeding off the response. Eric, meanwhile, is trapped awkwardly under the fallen ladder, his arms and one leg tangled between the rungs while he shouts in total outrage.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Get this off me! Ref! Referee! Do your job!"

Mark Bravo: "Do his job? It's a ladder match! There is no job!"

Bobby walks toward the mess in the corner, slower now, still sore, still laboring for breath, but with a new look of possibility in his eyes. He kneels down over the ladder and reaches through the rungs toward Eric, not to help him out, but to swat at his head and shoulders through the metal like a man batting at a raccoon in a trash can.

Bobby Dean: "Stay in there!"

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. is trapped!"

Mark Bravo: "And Bobby doesn't really know what to do next, but whatever this is, the people love it!"

Bobby slaps at Eric once more through the ladder, then looks up.

His eyes find the Hardcore Championship.

The crowd noise changes immediately.

They know what he's thinking.

John Phillips: "Wait a second..."

Mark Bravo: "No way."

Bobby slowly rises and turns toward the center of the ring, looking from the hanging title to a taller ladder standing outside on the floor near the timekeeper's area. He points at it.

Bobby Dean: "I need that one."

The crowd erupts in encouragement as Bobby starts waddling toward the ropes, one hand on his lower back, the other still motioning toward the taller ladder on the outside.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean may actually be thinking climb."

Mark Bravo: "I said it before and I'll say it again—I don't know if he can do it, but by God he is considering the project."

Behind him, Eric finally gets one arm free from the fallen ladder and reaches out from the corner with pure desperation on his face.

Eric Dane Jr.: "No! Bobby! Bobby, don't you touch another ladder!"

Bobby turns halfway back with a cheerful wave.

Bobby Dean: "Too late!"

The crowd explodes again as Bobby steps through the ropes and begins making his way toward the bigger ladder outside the ring.

Inside the ring, Eric Dane Jr. is still trapped in steel and panic.

And for the first time in the match, the impossible starts to feel just a little less impossible.

Bobby Dean steps down to the floor with all the urgency his body can manage, the crowd behind him growing louder with every labored stride. The taller ladder stands near the timekeeper's area like an impossible dream made of aluminum and bad ideas.

John Phillips: "Listen to this crowd! They believe Bobby Dean has an opening!"

Mark Bravo: "And I can't believe I'm saying this, but right now... he does!"

Bobby reaches the taller ladder and wraps both hands around one side rail. He gives it a tug.

It does not move much.

He adjusts his footing, exhales hard, and pulls again with a deeper grunt this time, dragging it an inch across the floor.

Bobby Dean: "C'mon, baby..."

Mark Bravo: "This is like watching a man try to move a refrigerator with optimism."

John Phillips: "But he is moving it."

Inside the ring, Eric Dane Jr. finally kicks one leg free from the collapsed ladder in the corner. He is no longer shouting from outrage alone now. There is panic in his voice. Real panic.

Eric Dane Jr.: "No! No! Absolutely not! Ref, help me with this!"

John Phillips: "There is no disqualification, no count-out, and no referee intervention in a situation like this. Eric Dane Jr. is on his own."

Mark Bravo: "And he hates being on his own."

Bobby gets the ladder moving now, dragging it toward the ring a few ugly inches at a time. The metal feet scrape and chatter against the floor as he pulls it around the corner of the apron. He pauses once, breathing heavily, then looks up toward the title hanging high overhead.

Bobby Dean: "I'm comin', sweetheart."

The crowd erupts with laughter and cheers.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean has not taken his eyes off that title for long."

Mark Bravo: "That belt is the moon and Bobby is trying to invent NASA in real time."

Back in the ring, Eric gets both hands free and shoves the ladder off his torso with a loud metallic crash. He scrambles to his knees, hair a mess, lip bloodied, and immediately sees Bobby still outside pulling the taller ladder into position.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Oh, hell no."

Eric dives toward the ropes and slips under the bottom strand to the apron, then drops to the floor. He starts sprinting around the ring, but not in full control. His lower back is still barking from the collision, and every few steps his body reminds him of it.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. is trying to cut this off!"

Mark Bravo: "Because now the joke is on him. Bobby Dean is threatening to make this match famous forever."

Bobby has gotten the ladder to one side of the ring and starts trying to angle it toward the apron. It is awkward, clumsy, and painfully slow. He tries to shove the front end under the bottom rope but the angle is wrong, so the top of the ladder bangs into the apron skirt and bounces back into him.

Mark Bravo: "Geometry is not his friend tonight."

John Phillips: "But determination still is."

Bobby readjusts, muttering to himself, then tries again—
and that is when Eric comes flying around the corner.

Eric Dane Jr.: "MOVE!"

Eric launches a forearm into the side of Bobby's head. Bobby staggers, still holding the ladder. Eric drills another forearm, then a chop to the chest, then a quick knee to the gut that finally forces Bobby to let go of the ladder and stumble back against the barricade.

John Phillips: "Eric cut him off just in time!"

Mark Bravo: "That was seconds away from Bobby trying the impossible for real."

The crowd boos loudly as Eric grabs Bobby by the robe collar and talks directly into his face.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You are not doing this to me. Not on my night."

Bobby, breathing hard, shoves weakly at Eric's chest once, but Eric answers with a sharp elbow to the jaw that drops him down to one knee on the floor.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. understanding the urgency now. He cannot let Bobby Dean build any momentum around those ladders."

Mark Bravo: "Because the longer Bobby stays alive in this thing, the more weird the world becomes."

Eric turns his eyes toward the mobility scooter still parked crookedly near the ring steps from Bobby's entrance collision. The crowd sees it a second before he does anything, and a murmur ripples outward.

Mark Bravo: "Uh oh."

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. looking at that scooter..."

Eric smiles. Not a happy smile. A terrible smile.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You know what, Bobb-o? Let's use your favorite toy."

The boos intensify as Eric stalks over to the scooter, grabs the handlebars, and yanks it away from the steps. Bobby sees it and his eyes widen immediately.

Bobby Dean: "Hey! Careful with that!"

Mark Bravo: "That is the first time tonight Bobby sounded genuinely concerned."

John Phillips: "That scooter has been part of Bobby Dean's entire presentation. It is absurd, yes, but it is also part of how he got here."

Eric jerks the scooter around until it is pointed directly at Bobby. Then, with an awful amount of satisfaction, he starts walking it forward like a battering ram.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Beep beep, idiot."

Bobby tries to rise and get out of the way, but he is too slow. Eric drives the front of the scooter right into Bobby's stomach, pinning him against the barricade with a jolt. Bobby yelps and folds over the handlebars as the crowd groans.

John Phillips: "Scooter to the midsection!"

Mark Bravo: "That is both ridiculous and somehow vicious!"

Eric backs the scooter up a foot and rams it in again, this time lower, smashing Bobby against the barricade a second time.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. turning Bobby Dean's own scooter into a weapon!"

Mark Bravo: "There are no rules and Eric has fully embraced being the worst possible version of himself!"

Bobby collapses sideways to the floor, clutching his ribs, robe half-open, breathing in short ugly gasps. Eric shoves the scooter away dismissively and wipes his hands like he touched something contaminated.

Eric Dane Jr.: "There. Now it's useful."

The crowd rains boos on him. Eric basks in them for half a second, then notices the taller ladder still beside the ring. His expression sharpens. He glances from Bobby on the floor to the ladder, then up to the title.

John Phillips: "And now Eric Dane Jr. has the opening again."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and unlike Bobby, Eric knows exactly what to do with it."

Eric grabs the tall ladder, folds it tighter, and with a grunt begins sliding it into the ring under the bottom rope. The crowd starts buzzing again because they know what that means. This is not the smaller ladder from before. This one brings him much closer to the gold.

John Phillips: "That taller ladder may be the key to the whole match."

Mark Bravo: "And Bobby Dean handed Eric the idea just by trying."

Eric shoves the ladder fully into the ring and quickly follows. He gets to his feet, drags the ladder into the center, and starts opening it with quick, practiced motions. His breathing is heavier now. His back still hurts. But the confidence has come flooding back.

Eric Dane Jr.: "That's game."

Outside the ring, Bobby Dean is still on the floor near the barricade. He rolls onto his side and reaches weakly for the apron skirt. The camera catches his face. The excitement is still in there somewhere, but now it is buried under pain and exhaustion.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean is in bad shape outside."

Mark Bravo: "He took ladder shots, got crushed with his own scooter, and now the one ladder that might've helped him just got stolen."

In the ring, Eric plants the taller ladder dead center beneath the title and looks up with a grin that feels almost predatory now. He places one hand on each rail and nods to himself.

John Phillips: "This is the clearest path Eric Dane Jr. has had all match."

Mark Bravo: "And if Bobby doesn't move soon, it may be enough."

Eric starts climbing.

One rung.

Then another.

Then a third.

The crowd volume rises as one because outside the ring, Bobby Dean has managed to get both hands on the apron. He pulls once. Slips. Pulls again. His legs scramble beneath him, trying to find leverage.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean is trying to get back in!"

Mark Bravo: "This crowd is trying to pull him in with sheer will!"

Eric climbs higher.

Bobby finally gets one knee under himself and drags his body to the apron edge. He reaches under the bottom rope but cannot quite get there yet. Eric is halfway up the ladder now, then higher, his fingertips starting to brush near the hanging championship.

John Phillips: "Eric is getting close!"

Mark Bravo: "Bobby has to do something right now!"

Bobby looks up. Sees Eric. Sees the title. Sees the distance.

And then, with all the desperation of a man trying to save his entire world, Bobby reaches blindly under the ring instead of for the ropes.

John Phillips: "What is he doing?"

Mark Bravo: "I don't know, but I believe in the chaos."

Bobby feels around frantically beneath the apron. His hand disappears in shadow for a moment. Then his expression changes.

He found something.

Eric, above them both, gets one hand on the championship and starts trying to unhook the clasp.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. has a hand on the title!"

Mark Bravo: "No no no no no—"

And just then Bobby Dean yanks his arm out from under the ring holding a bowling ball.

The crowd detonates.

Mark Bravo: "WHY IS THERE A BOWLING BALL?!"

John Phillips: "I don't know!"

Bobby clutches the bowling ball to his chest, gasping for breath, then looks from it... to Eric on the ladder... and back again.

Bobby Dean: "Oh this'll work."

The crowd completely loses it as Bobby starts trying to get to his feet with the bowling ball while Eric, above him, still has one hand on the title and no idea what fresh nightmare is developing below.

Bobby Dean rises only halfway before realizing the obvious problem.

The bowling ball is heavy.

Very heavy.

Especially when you are Bobby Dean, half-crushed, out of breath, and trying to save your title from a man halfway to the ceiling.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean has a bowling ball."

Mark Bravo: "That sentence should never be normal, and yet tonight it somehow is."

Inside the ring, Eric Dane Jr. has no idea what Bobby found yet. He is too busy stretching upward from the upper rungs of the ladder, one hand gripping the support cable, the other fumbling with the championship hook.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Come on... come on..."

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. is seconds away here!"

Mark Bravo: "Bobby better throw whatever he found, pray with it, or build a house out of it, because he is running out of time!"

Bobby clutches the bowling ball in both arms and waddles toward the ring apron. He makes it two steps before the sheer effort forces him to stop and reset. The crowd is screaming at him now, willing him forward. Eric finally glances down—

and his face changes instantly.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Why do you have a bowling ball?!"

Mark Bravo: "Fair question!"

John Phillips: "I don't believe Bobby Dean intends to explain!"

Bobby huffs, readjusts his grip, and lumbers to the apron with the bowling ball hugged to his chest like a newborn. He bends his knees and tries to roll it under the bottom rope into the ring.

It gets stuck halfway.

Mark Bravo: "No! No no no! Not logistics again!"

The crowd groans and then starts laughing as Bobby shoves harder. The ball squeaks against the canvas edge, refuses to move, and leaves Bobby red-faced with effort.

Bobby Dean: "Get in there!"

John Phillips: "The bowling ball is caught under the bottom rope!"

Mark Bravo: "This is the dumbest emergency response I've ever seen, and I am riveted!"

Above them, Eric sees his opening again and reaches high for the title.

John Phillips: "Eric is back on the championship!"

Bobby looks up, sees Eric nearly unhooking the title, and abandons the attempt to push the ball under the ropes. Instead, with a desperate grunt, he lifts it just enough off the floor and slams it against the apron skirt.

BOOM!

The whole ring shudders.

John Phillips: "What impact!"

Mark Bravo: "Okay! Okay! The bowling ball has become an earthquake!"

Eric jolts on the ladder, both hands shooting back to the rails to keep balance as the structure quivers beneath him. The title slips out of his fingers.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Stop doing things!"

Bobby, eyes wide as he realizes that actually worked, slams the bowling ball into the apron again.

BOOM!

The ladder shakes harder this time. Eric clings to the top, his body swaying as the crowd erupts in fresh belief.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean has found a way to attack the ladder without ever entering the ring!"

Mark Bravo: "He discovered siege warfare!"

Bobby growls and tries for a third shot, hoisting the ball one more time with both hands. But now the exhaustion catches up to him. His arms tremble. His knees wobble. He gets the ball chest-high and loses control of it.

The bowling ball slips from his grip.

It drops to the floor.

And it lands right on his own foot.

Bobby Dean: "AAAAAAAH!"

Mark Bravo: "OH NO!"

John Phillips: "The bowling ball hit Bobby Dean!"

Bobby hops backward on one foot, howling, clutching the apron with one hand and shaking the other leg wildly while the crowd gasps and then erupts into a tortured mixture of sympathy and laughter. Eric, still on the ladder, starts laughing in sheer disbelief.

Eric Dane Jr.: "That's what you get! You absolute cartoon!"

Mark Bravo: "I was with Bobby right up until the self-inflicted bowling injury."

Bobby bends over, grabbing at his foot and muttering in pain while the bowling ball rolls away a few inches and stops near the scooter. The moment of opportunity appears gone.

John Phillips: "That may have been Bobby Dean's last big chance to stop the climb!"

Mark Bravo: "And now Eric is reset again!"

Eric re-centers himself on the ladder and reaches upward once more. He gets one hand on the title, then both, trying to lift it clean off the hook.

John Phillips: "He's got it!"

Mark Bravo: "This is it!"

Outside the ring, Bobby is still bent over, rubbing his foot, face twisted in agony. He looks up through the pain and sees Eric almost pulling the championship free.

Then his eyes drift sideways.

To the scooter.

Still parked crookedly nearby.

Still on.

Still facing the apron.

Bobby slowly looks from the scooter... to the ring... to the ladder... to Eric.

Mark Bravo: "No."

John Phillips: "He's not thinking..."

Bobby limps toward the scooter with sudden purpose. The crowd starts realizing it one section at a time, a ripple of noise building like a wave. Bobby throws one leg over the scooter seat, winces from the foot pain, then plants both hands on the handlebars.

Bobby Dean: "I am absolutely thinkin'."

Mark Bravo: "OH MY GOD HE IS!"

Inside the ring, Eric has the title halfway unhooked when he hears the horn.

HONK! HONK!

Eric freezes.

He looks down.

Bobby Dean is riding the scooter straight at the ring.

Eric Dane Jr.: "No. No no no no no!"

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean is going to ram the ring!"

Mark Bravo: "THIS IS WHY YOU DON'T GIVE HIM A VEHICLE!"

Bobby floors it.

The scooter tears forward across the floor, robe flapping, Bobby squinting with determination and pain as he lines up the center of the apron.

HONK! HONK! HOOOOONK!

Then—

WHAM!

The scooter slams into the apron dead-on.

The entire ring jumps.

The ladder jerks violently.

Eric loses both hands on the title and topples sideways off the ladder, crashing down throat-first across the top rope before flipping backward to the mat in a heap.

John Phillips: "ERIC DANE JR. JUST GOT THROWN OFF THE LADDER!"

Mark Bravo: "THE SCOOTER STRIKE WORKED!"

The crowd loses its collective mind as Bobby bounces backward with the scooter, nearly falling off the seat himself, but managing somehow to stay upright. Inside the ring, Eric writhes on the canvas coughing and clutching at his throat and chest, his title-grab undone in an instant.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean may have just saved the match!"

Mark Bravo: "He weaponized transportation, John!"

Bobby climbs shakily off the scooter, limping badly now between the crushed foot and everything else Eric has done to him. But the crowd is deafening, and the sound gives him life. He slaps the scooter affectionately once.

Bobby Dean: "Good girl."

Mark Bravo: "I cannot believe he thanked the scooter."

Bobby rolls under the bottom rope and into the ring as Eric struggles on hands and knees. The ladder still stands in the center, swaying slightly, the championship still hanging overhead by the hook.

John Phillips: "For the second time tonight, Eric Dane Jr. had the match within reach, and for the second time Bobby Dean found a completely unpredictable answer!"

Mark Bravo: "And now the ring belongs to chaos again!"

Bobby crawls to one side of the ladder and pulls himself up using the rungs. Across from him, Eric reaches the other side and does the same. Both men are exhausted. Both men are hurting. Both men look up.

The Hardcore Championship hangs above them.

The crowd roars as they lock eyes through the ladder.

John Phillips: "And now what?"

Mark Bravo: "Now we find out who wants it more... the egotist who thinks it's his, or the impossible old fool who refuses to let go."

Eric slaps Bobby through the ladder rungs.

Bobby answers with a clubbing forearm through the other side.

The crowd rises even louder as the two men begin fighting through the ladder in the center of the ring, with the title still dangling just above them both.

The ladder stands in the center of the ring, swaying faintly beneath the hanging Hardcore Championship. Bobby Dean and Eric Dane Jr. are on opposite sides, both dragging themselves upward rung by rung, every movement slower now, heavier now, the punishment of the match hanging from both men like extra weight.

John Phillips: "They are both climbing!"

Mark Bravo: "I cannot believe what I am seeing!"

Eric climbs first, quicker by instinct, but not by much now. His back is screaming. His throat still burns from that nasty spill off the ladder. His arms are trembling every time he reaches higher. Still, he keeps going. One rung. Then another.

And then he looks across.

And freezes.

Because somehow—somehow—Bobby Dean has made it nearly all the way up the other side.

Eric Dane Jr.: "No... no, no, no..."

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. is stunned!"

Mark Bravo: "He can't believe Bobby Dean made the climb!"

The crowd is unglued now, roaring at the impossible sight of Bobby Dean, bath robe half hanging off one shoulder, chest pumping, face red, hair matted with sweat, standing near the top of the ladder with his hands locked white-knuckled around the side rails.

John Phillips: "Every doubt, every joke, every question about whether Bobby Dean could ever climb a ladder—look at him now!"

Mark Bravo: "He did it! I don't know how, I don't know why, I don't know what laws of nature we just broke, but Bobby Dean is up there!"

Eric stares at him in total shock, mouth open, blinking through the sweat and pain like his brain is refusing to process what his eyes are seeing.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You've gotta be kidding me..."

Bobby, barely able to hold himself upright, lifts one tired hand from the ladder and points weakly toward the title.

Bobby Dean: "Told ya."

The crowd explodes again.

Mark Bravo: "That man is running on fumes and faith!"

Eric's stunned expression curdles into anger. Then panic. Then fury.

He cocks his arm back and fires a huge right hand across the top of the ladder.

John Phillips: "Big right from Eric Dane Jr.!"

The punch snaps Bobby's head to the side, and for a terrifying second his body tilts with it. The ladder wobbles. The audience gasps.

But Bobby does not fall.

Instead he turns back, eyes glassy but locked in, and throws one of his own.

Mark Bravo: "Bobby answers!"

John Phillips: "Right hand from Bobby Dean!"

It is not the cleanest punch ever thrown, but it lands flush enough to rock Eric sideways. Dane grabs the top of the ladder with one hand and shakes out his other fist in pain and disbelief.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Ow! Damn it!"

Bobby swings again. This one catches Eric across the cheekbone. Eric fires back with another right. Bobby answers. Eric again. Bobby again.

John Phillips: "Trading shots at the top of the ladder!"

Mark Bravo: "This is insane! There is no room for error up there!"

Right hand by Eric.

Right hand by Bobby.

Another from Eric.

Another from Bobby.

Each shot is slower than the last. Heavier than the last. Both men are exhausted beyond reason, held upright by will more than balance, more than strength, more than anything physical left in their bodies.

John Phillips: "Neither man wants to let go!"

Mark Bravo: "Because letting go means the whole night is gone!"

Eric throws another punch and nearly throws himself off balance doing it. He catches the top of the ladder just in time, hanging there awkwardly as Bobby draws back once more. Eric's eyes widen. His body slips.

Now Eric Dane Jr. is barely hanging on, one hand off the side, the other clinging desperately to the ladder. His boot slips from one rung and for a horrifying second he dangles there with only the fingertips of one hand and the tiniest grip of his opposite pinky keeping him from tumbling all the way down.

John Phillips: "Eric is losing it!"

Mark Bravo: "He is hanging on by almost nothing!"

The crowd rises to a shriek as Eric swings wildly in open space, trying to recover any kind of position. Bobby sees him in trouble, sees the opening, sees the title above them, and rears back for one more desperate shot to finish it.

Bobby Dean: "This is it!"

Bobby throws the punch.

Eric jerks his head just enough.

The fist whistles past him.

Bobby's own momentum carries him forward over the top of the ladder for a split second, and that is all Eric Dane Jr. needs.

He snaps back in, grabbing the side rail with one hand to steady himself, then lunges in with the other arm and catches Bobby high across the head and shoulder, clutching at him, pulling himself back into position while hooking Bobby off-center.

John Phillips: "Eric moved!"

Mark Bravo: "And now he's got him!"

Eric regains both feet on the rung somehow, breathing in ragged panicked bursts, and now the two are chest-to-chest at the top of the ladder, foreheads almost touching, both barely hanging on in different ways.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You crazy old man..."

Bobby Dean: "Still here."

Eric Dane Jr.: "You were never supposed to make it up here."

Bobby Dean: "Maybe you talk too much."

The crowd hums beneath them, the noise shifting from pure chaos to something more emotional now. The title hangs just above their heads, but for a heartbeat neither man reaches for it. They are too busy staring at each other.

John Phillips: "What a moment..."

Mark Bravo: "This got real a long time ago, John... but right now? This is something else."

Eric and Bobby lock eyes. The hatred from Eric is still there, but now it is mixed with something stranger. Disbelief. Respect he doesn't want to admit. A stunned understanding that this ridiculous man he wanted to embarrass has somehow climbed into the same impossible place he did.

Bobby's eyes are full too. Exhaustion. Pride. Hurt. But mostly warmth. That same weird, sincere, impossible warmth that has defined him all the way through this madness.

Bobby Dean: "I love you, Eric."

The building erupts in a strange, beautiful, aching noise.

John Phillips: "Oh my..."

Mark Bravo: "I... wow."

Eric blinks.

For once, genuinely speechless.

Then his face softens just enough. The smallest smile. Tired. Crooked. Almost human.

Eric Dane Jr.: "You too, Bobb-o."

And then—

BAM!

Eric drives a vicious right hand straight into Bobby Dean's face.

John Phillips: "NO!"

Mark Bravo: "HE BLASTED HIM!"

Bobby's body goes limp for half a second. His hands slip free of the ladder. The robe flares out as he falls backward into empty space.

Then he crashes.

CRASH!

Bobby Dean slams through the canvas in a heap near the base of the ladder, the impact so loud and so ugly that the entire arena seems to stop breathing for a second.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean just fell all the way down!"

Mark Bravo: "Oh no... oh no..."

Eric remains at the top, clutching the ladder, chest heaving, eyes wide, hair hanging in his face, the title still overhead. Below him lies Bobby Dean, motionless for the moment, sprawled on the mat after the heartbreaking fall.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. is alone at the top."

Mark Bravo: "And after all of that... after the climb, the punches, the impossible moment... he did what Eric Dane Jr. always does."

John Phillips: "He took the moment for himself."

The camera tightens on Eric, breathing like a hunted man who somehow survived. Then it cuts down to Bobby Dean, fallen beneath him. Then back up to the Hardcore Championship hanging there, one final prize waiting above the wreckage.

Eric slowly reaches upward.

Eric Dane Jr. hangs there at the top of the ladder, chest heaving, one arm hooked around the side rail to keep himself upright after the exchange, the other slowly reaching up through the lights toward the Hardcore Championship.

Below him, Bobby Dean is down on the canvas in a broken heap, blue sparkly robe splayed around him, the aftermath of the fall still hanging over the ring like smoke after an explosion.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean is down..."

Mark Bravo: "And Eric Dane Jr. has one final opening."

The arena, so loud just moments ago, is suddenly hushed.

Not silent.

Stunned.

The kind of stunned that only comes when thousands of people realize at the same time that the story they wanted is slipping away in front of them.

Eric reaches the hook.

His fingers fumble once, then find it.

He pulls.

The title jerks.

He pulls again, gritting his teeth, body swaying with the effort.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. trying to unhook it!"

Mark Bravo: "Come on... come on..."

One more tug.

The clasp gives.

And the Hardcore Championship comes free into Eric Dane Jr.'s hands.

John Phillips: "He got it."

Mark Bravo: "Eric Dane Jr. has the championship."

The bell rings below, but even that feels far away compared to the image in the ring.

Eric pulls the title into his chest and clutches it tightly against himself at the very top of the ladder, his entire body trembling from exhaustion, adrenaline, and relief. His eyes shut for one brief second as he holds it there, forehead nearly resting against the gold.

It is the picture he wanted.

The moment he envisioned.

And somehow, with all the chaos and near disaster and madness it took to get here, he has it.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. survives one of the strangest and most emotional ladder matches we have ever seen... and he leaves with Bobby Dean's Hardcore Championship."

Mark Bravo: "Look at this shot."

The camera pulls wide.

At the top of the ladder, Eric Dane Jr. sits in triumph, clutching the championship like treasure stolen from a shipwreck.

Below him, Bobby Dean remains down on the mat, the man who came so impossibly close to the unthinkable now lying beneath the scene that ended his dream.

The title gleams under the white lights.

The ladder stands in the center like a monument.

The shot is epic.

But the crowd is in shock.

There is no roaring celebration. No universal explosion of noise.

Just a strange ocean of stunned faces, hands on heads, mouths open, trying to process the heartbreak of what they

just watched.

John Phillips: "This is victory... but it doesn't feel joyous."

Mark Bravo: "Because everybody in this building got pulled into Bobby Dean's miracle. And then they watched Eric Dane Jr. punch it right out of the sky."

Eric opens his eyes and slowly lifts the title away from his chest, looking at it with a smile that starts small and then grows wider. He turns his head just enough to glance down at Bobby Dean below him.

There is no apology in his face.

No guilt.

Only vindication.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Mine."

The boos begin to rise now. Not all at once. Wave by wave. Building from stunned disappointment into angry rejection as the reality settles in. Eric hears them and only seems to enjoy them more.

John Phillips: "You knew Eric Dane Jr. would savor this if he won. But what a brutal image for Bobby Dean, who gave this crowd everything he had."

Mark Bravo: "Bobby Dean climbed the mountain, John. Nobody thought he'd even find the trail. And in the end, he fell one rung short."

Eric raises the championship one-handed from the top of the ladder.

The crowd boos thunderously now.

But the image is undeniable: Eric Dane Jr., battered and arrogant and victorious, holding the Hardcore Championship high above the ring on one of the biggest nights of the year.

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. came to Victorious believing this would be another spotlight for his ego."

Mark Bravo: "Instead he got a war, a circus, a miracle, a scooter assault, a bowling ball, and the most emotionally confusing declaration of love in wrestling history."

John Phillips: "And somehow through all of that... he still leaves champion."

The camera cuts one more time to Bobby Dean below, still down, still not fully moving, the heartbreak of the moment written all over the ring around him.

Then back up.

Eric at the top.

The championship in his arms.

The epic shot complete.

And a crowd still trying to come to terms with what it just witnessed.

Rewind and Aftermath

Segment

The screen cuts to a quick replay package as the crowd noise in Omaha continues to pour over the arena.

We see the opening highlights in sharp succession.

Eric Dane Jr. making his grand, sparkling entrance in the robe and sunglasses.

Bobby Dean emerging in the blue sparkly bath robe to a chant that started fake and became something very real.

The mobility scooter entrance.

The crash into the ring steps.

The first time Bobby trapped Eric in the corner with his sheer size and force.

Eric taking over with the ladders.

Bobby shaking the ladder and knocking Eric off balance.

The trap in the corner backfiring and Eric crashing into the wedged steel.

Bobby trying to drag the taller ladder into the ring.

Eric using the scooter as a weapon.

The bowling ball under the ring.

The bowling ball to Bobby's own foot.

The scooter ram into the apron that saved the match.

Both men climbing.

Bobby Dean somehow making it to the top.

The exchange of punches on the ladder.

Bobby's heartfelt words.

Eric's brief answer.

And then the final right hand that sent Bobby Dean crashing down before Eric tore the championship free.

John Phillips: "What a surreal, emotional, and unforgettable ladder match we just witnessed."

Mark Bravo: "I don't even know how to describe it. It was chaos, comedy, violence, heartbreak... and somehow all of it worked."

John Phillips: "Nobody believed Bobby Dean could even make the climb. Nobody believed he could hang in a ladder match of this scale."

Mark Bravo: "And then the crazy son of a gun got all the way to the top and made believers out of everybody in this building."

John Phillips: "But in the end, Eric Dane Jr. did what he always promised he would do. He found the moment, he stole it, and he leaves Victorious with the Hardcore Championship."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah... but he didn't leave untouched. Not physically, not emotionally, not any way you slice it. Bobby Dean made this matter."

The replay fades out.

We come back live.

Eric Dane Jr. is standing in the ring now, the Hardcore Championship draped over his shoulder. His chest is still rising heavily from the battle. Sweat pours down his face. His lip is split. His hair is a mess. The smug arrogance is still there... but quieter now.

At his feet, a few feet away on the canvas, Bobby Dean is still down, slowly stirring after the fall.

Eric looks down at him.

For a moment, he says nothing.

No grandstanding. No shouting. No demand for cameras.

Just a look.

And in that look, there is something he did not walk into this match expecting to feel.

Respect.

John Phillips: "Look at Eric Dane Jr. here."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. He's still a jerk. Let's not get carried away. But I think even he knows Bobby Dean gave him something tonight he did not bargain for."

John Phillips: "He expected a punchline. He got a fight. He got a moment. He got a crowd that believed in the impossible."

Eric shifts the title on his shoulder and gives Bobby one final look down. There is the faintest nod. Barely there. Easy to miss. Then he turns and makes his way out of the ring without another word.

Mark Bravo: "That might be the closest thing to admiration Eric Dane Jr. has ever shown another human being."

John Phillips: "And that may tell you everything you need to know about Bobby Dean tonight."

Eric drops down to the floor and begins walking backward up the ramp, championship over his shoulder, eyes still occasionally drifting back toward the ring before finally turning toward the stage.

Inside the ring, Bobby Dean remains down for another few seconds.

The crowd begins to stir again.

Then louder.

Then louder still.

"BOB-BY! BOB-BY! BOB-BY! BOB-BY!"

John Phillips: "Listen to this."

Mark Bravo: "That is not sympathy. That is appreciation."

Bobby rolls slowly onto one hip and starts to sit up, wincing from the pain, his robe disheveled, one hand on his lower back, the other pressed to the mat to steady himself. The referee kneels beside him immediately, checking on him and helping guide him the rest of the way up.

John Phillips: "Bobby Dean trying to collect himself here."

The referee helps Bobby to one knee.

The chants only get louder.

Then, with a hand under one arm and another at his back, the referee helps Bobby Dean to his feet.

The moment Bobby stands, the crowd erupts.

Mark Bravo: "There he is."

Bobby is hurting. There is no question about that. He favors one foot. His ribs ache. His face is worn from the match. But when he hears the fans, really hears them, his expression changes.

His eyes widen.

Then he smiles.

That same sincere, warm, impossible Bobby Dean smile.

John Phillips: "He may have lost the match... but this crowd is telling Bobby Dean exactly what they think of what he gave them tonight."

Mark Bravo: "And to Bobby? This is still a win."

Bobby gently pulls away from the referee and stands on his own, however unsteady. He places a hand over his chest as the fans continue chanting for him. He turns slowly, looking out to one side of the arena, then the other, taking it all in like a man who has just been handed something bigger than the title he failed to keep.

Bobby Dean: "Thank you."

The words are simple, almost lost beneath the noise, but the crowd sees them on his lips and gets even louder.

John Phillips: "That is what wrestling is all about."

Mark Bravo: "A guy everybody expected to laugh at walked out here and made people believe. That's a win where I come from."

Bobby points up toward the crowd, then to himself, then wipes at one eye before quickly pretending he didn't. The referee remains nearby, ready if he needs him, but for this moment Bobby is standing on his own.

The chants continue to rain down over him.

He may not have the Hardcore Championship anymore.

But as he stands in the center of the ring at Victorious, battered and exhausted and smiling through it all, Bobby Dean looks every bit like a man who still found victory.

Miscarriage of Justice

Segment

The camera cuts backstage where Melissa Cartwright stands in the interview area, microphone in hand. Beside her are "Classy" Bianca Page and Ace Andrews, both dressed impeccably and carrying themselves like the room ought to be grateful they agreed to stop in it.

Melissa Cartwright: "Melissa Cartwright here backstage with "Classy" Bianca Page and Ace Andrews."

Bianca and Ace share a quick glance with one another before turning back to Melissa with the kind of polished smile that feels more obligatory than sincere.

Melissa Cartwright: "Ace, Bianca... can the two of you believe what we just saw moments ago?"

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Oh my God, Melissa. Neither Ace nor I care what just happened. It doesn't concern us."

Bianca throws one hand out in frustration.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Explain that to me, Melissa. Why do we care?"

Her voice starts to rise, sharp with annoyance, but before it can fully boil over, Ace calmly places a hand on Bianca's shoulder. Bianca takes a breath, visibly forcing herself to rein it in.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "What Ace and I are focused on is winning matches, winning championships, and making as much money as humanly possible."

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Because Platinum Made Society is going to be running UTA soon enough."

Ace Andrews: "And if you don't believe us..."

Ace gives a slight shrug.

Ace Andrews: "Just watch what Samuel Scythe does in the six-man match tonight."

Melissa Cartwright: "So what exactly are you focused on right now?"

Bianca and Ace both scoff at the question, as if the answer should have been obvious to anyone with a functioning brain.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Did you not hear what I just said?"

"Classy" Bianca Page: "The UTA Women's World Championship. The United States Championship. The International Championship."

"Classy" Bianca Page: "I want gold around my waist, and every week I'm not booked is another week this company delays me from becoming champion."

Bianca steps closer to Melissa, her expression tightening.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "So tell me, Melissa... why are the higher-ups in UTA affecting their own bottom line by not giving me television time?"

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Do they hate money?"

Melissa Cartwright: "I highly doubt they hate money..."

"Classy" Bianca Page: "How do you know that, Melissa?!"

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Can you see their thoughts?"

Bianca's voice rises again, anger and disbelief colliding as Ace remains composed beside her.

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Because the way they're scheduling this show says otherwise, and we are not going to stand for it anymore."

"Classy" Bianca Page: "Honestly, I'm almost embarrassed for UTA."

"Classy" Bianca Page: "But don't worry. We'll correct this miscarriage of justice one way or another."

Bianca turns sharply and storms off. Ace lingers for just a second, offering Melissa a calm, almost sympathetic smile that somehow feels even more condescending than Bianca's outburst.

Then he follows her out of frame as the camera fades away from the interview area.

It Reigns

Segment

The noise of the arena becomes muffled now, replaced by the colder hum of fluorescent lights and the low vibration of distant production equipment somewhere beyond the walls. A black-and-gold plaque mounted beside a heavy door reads simply:

THE EMPIRE

The camera pushes inside.

The atmosphere is immediate.

Heavy.

Focused.

Dangerous.

Inside the locker room, the Empire stands assembled.

Valkyrie Knoxx is in front of her locker, dressed to compete, rolling her shoulders once and flexing her taped hands as she stares at her own reflection in the mirror. There is no fear on her face. No hesitation. Only intensity. Only the sharpened look of a woman about to walk into the biggest opportunity of her career.

Nearby, Amy Harrison stands already dressed for war herself, the International Championship slung over one shoulder. Her posture is perfect. Her expression is cold. Her eyes are lit with the kind of confidence only a woman on the brink of history can carry. Tonight, she is not just preparing for a match. She is preparing for legacy.

Trey Mack leans against the far wall, arms folded, silent and severe. Beside him is Clovis Black, just as immovable, just as menacing, looking less like backup and more like the kind of man you notice right before a situation becomes very bad for someone else.

John Phillips: "And now we are inside the Empire locker room."

Mark Bravo: "And you can feel the difference immediately. No smiles. No wasted words. This is a room full of people who came here expecting to leave with more power than they walked in with."

The camera settles on Valkyrie first.

She bounces lightly in place, loosening up, then slaps her own chest once and exhales through her nose. Amy steps toward her, calm as ever, title still over her shoulder.

Amy Harrison: "You know what tonight is, don't you?"

Valkyrie keeps her eyes ahead.

Valkyrie Knoxx: "My night."

Amy Harrison: "Damn right it is."

Amy takes another step closer, voice low, controlled, but razor sharp.

Amy Harrison: "Emily Hightower has spent her whole life surrounded by protection. Family. Name. Legacy. Excuses. Tonight, all of that means nothing."

Amy Harrison: "Tonight, she steps into Fighting Championship Rules with a woman who does not need a family name to be dangerous."

Valkyrie finally turns her head and locks eyes with Amy.

Valkyrie Knoxx: "I'm gonna break her."

Amy Harrison: "No."

Valkyrie pauses.

Amy's expression does not change.

Amy Harrison: "You're going to expose her."

Amy Harrison: "You're going to show the whole world that Emily Hightower is not built for the pressure that comes with a real fight."

Amy Harrison: "And when that championship is in your hands... the Empire grows stronger."

Valkyrie nods once. No theatrics. No wasted energy. Just understanding.

Mark Bravo: "That right there is what makes Amy so dangerous. Everybody else screams. Everybody else rants. Amy just says a thing like it's already happened."

John Phillips: "Because in her mind, it already has."

The camera shifts now to Trey Mack and Clovis Black.

Neither man has moved much at all. Trey's stare is fixed and unreadable, his presence still carrying that same sharp edge that has made him one of the most unnerving men in UTA. Clovis Black stands beside him like a living warning, chin slightly raised, hands folded in front of him, every bit as intimidating in silence as most men are while shouting.

John Phillips: "And there they are. Trey Mack and Clovis Black."

Mark Bravo: "I don't care how many times you see them, it never gets less unsettling. Those are not men you want waiting in a room when the door closes."

Amy turns from Valkyrie and looks toward them.

Trey pushes off the wall and steps forward just enough to enter the center of the frame.

Trey Mack: "Tonight is about control."

His voice is calm. Almost too calm.

Trey Mack: "No mistakes. No panic. No doubt."

Trey Mack: "We don't chase moments."

Trey Mack: "We take them."

Clovis gives a slight nod beside him.

Clovis Black: "And if anybody gets in the way..."

He lets the sentence hang there.

He does not need to finish it.

Mark Bravo: "See, that's what I mean. He doesn't even have to say the rest. You already know the rest."

Amy smirks faintly now, pleased with the mood, pleased with the people around her, pleased with the kind of night that is unfolding in front of them.

Amy Harrison: "Valkyrie takes the Fighting Championship."

She adjusts the title on her shoulder.

Amy Harrison: "And later tonight..."

Her tone sharpens even further.

Amy Harrison: "I make history."

John Phillips: "There it is. Amy Harrison fully focused on the main event to come."

Mark Bravo: "And what a main event it is. Amy Harrison and Marie Van Claudio one more time. Servitude versus championship. The New Empire and the Old Empire circling the ring. You want stakes? That match has enough stakes for ten shows."

Amy slowly turns toward the camera now.

The room behind her is still. Valkyrie rolling her neck and bouncing on the balls of her feet. Trey and Clovis standing like carved stone. The whole frame looks less like a locker room and more like a war room.

Amy Harrison: "Marie Van Claudio had her era."

Amy Harrison: "Emily Hightower has her family."

Amy Harrison: "Tonight belongs to us."

Amy Harrison: "Tonight the Empire doesn't survive."

Amy Harrison: "It reigns."

She turns away from the camera without another word.

John Phillips: "The Empire looks ready."

Mark Bravo: "Ready? They look like they've already decided the outcome."

The Stakes are High

Segment

The scene shifts once more backstage.

This time, the energy could not be more different.

No group. No wall of intimidation. No war room full of bodies and strategy.

Just one locker room.

One woman.

And the weight of everything waiting for her tonight.

The camera eases through the half-open door into Marie Van Claudio's locker room.

It is quiet inside. Almost sacred.

Marie Van Claudio sits alone on a wooden bench in front of her locker, head lowered slightly, methodically lacing her boots with practiced hands. Her ring gear is on. Her posture is upright. Controlled. Focused. Beside her on the bench, resting in plain view beneath the room's cool overhead light, is the UTA Women's Championship.

The title gleams.

So does the silence around it.

John Phillips: "And now to a very different scene. Marie Van Claudio alone."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. No entourage. No speeches. No backup. Just the champion and the storm waiting outside the door."

Marie tightens one lace, then the next, pulling each knot firm like she's locking herself into the moment one step at a time. There is no panic in her face. No visible fear. But there is gravity. There is history. There is the unmistakable look of a woman who knows exactly what is on the line and exactly what it will cost to hold onto it.

A soft knock comes at the door frame.

Marie looks up.

Standing there is the United States Champion, Susanita Ybanez, her championship resting over her shoulder. She does not walk in with swagger tonight. She walks in with concern.

Susanita Ybanez: "You got a minute?"

Marie gives a faint nod.

Marie Van Claudio: "For you? Always."

Susanita steps into the room and closes the door gently behind her. For a second she just stands there, looking at Marie, then at the title on the bench, then back at Marie again. She knows this is not just another match. Neither of them is pretending otherwise.

John Phillips: "These two women have built a strong mutual respect over the last several weeks."

Mark Bravo: "Because they both know what it means to carry gold the right way."

Susanita steps closer, expression serious.

Susanita Ybanez: "I just came to tell you... be careful tonight."

Marie says nothing at first. She finishes one lace, tucks it, then rests her hands on her knee.

Susanita Ybanez: "Amy is dangerous enough by herself."

Susanita Ybanez: "But with all of them out there..."

She shakes her head once.

Susanita Ybanez: "That isn't just a match. That's a setup waiting to happen."

John Phillips: "Susanita Ybanez knows exactly what Amy Harrison and the Empire are capable of."

Mark Bravo: "And she's not wrong. A lumberjill match is already chaos. Add the Empire. Add the old guard on the outside. Add those insane stipulations. That thing is a powder keg."

Marie leans back slightly on the bench and lets out a slow breath through her nose. Her gaze drifts for a brief moment to the Women's Championship beside her before returning to Susanita.

Marie Van Claudio: "I know what tonight is."

Marie Van Claudio: "I know who Amy is."

Marie Van Claudio: "And I know exactly what she wants."

Her voice is calm, but there is steel underneath it.

Marie Van Claudio: "She doesn't just want to beat me."

Marie Van Claudio: "She wants to erase me."

Susanita's face hardens. She knows that is true.

Marie Van Claudio: "She wants to stand over everything I built and call it hers."

Marie Van Claudio: "She wants the division, the spotlight, the history... all of it."

Marie reaches over and places one hand on the Women's Championship.

Marie Van Claudio: "And if I walk away from this now... if I start doubting now... then I'm handing it to her before the bell ever rings."

John Phillips: "There's the heart of it."

Mark Bravo: "Marie Van Claudio did not become Marie Van Claudio by backing down when the stakes got ugly."

Susanita takes another step closer.

Susanita Ybanez: "This isn't backing down."

Susanita Ybanez: "This is me saying I know what they're willing to do."

Susanita Ybanez: "And I don't want to see you walk into it alone."

Marie's expression softens.

Not into weakness. Into gratitude.

Marie Van Claudio: "I know."

Marie Van Claudio: "And I appreciate it."

She stands now, slowly but firmly, taking the title from the bench and holding it in both hands for a moment before settling it over her shoulder.

Marie Van Claudio: "But I can't back down."

Marie Van Claudio: "Not tonight. Not now. Not from this."

The two women lock eyes.

There is no argument left in Susanita after that. Only understanding.

John Phillips: "Marie knows exactly what kind of crossroads this is."

Mark Bravo: "And she's choosing to walk right into the fire."

Marie adjusts the championship on her shoulder, then glances down at the United States Title Susanita carries.

Marie Van Claudio: "Besides..."

A slight smile touches her lips.

Marie Van Claudio: "You don't need to be this worried about me."

Marie Van Claudio: "You need to be worried about Troy Lindz."

Susanita exhales through her nose and gives the faintest nod.

Susanita Ybanez: "I am."

Marie Van Claudio: "Good."

Marie Van Claudio: "Because Troy isn't coming in alone anymore."

Marie Van Claudio: "Not really."

Marie Van Claudio: "And people start changing when they get convinced the wrong voice in their ear sounds like strength."

John Phillips: "That is a direct reference to the Creed Method and the transformation we've seen in Troy Lindz over recent weeks."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, Troy's not just another challenger anymore. There's a hardness there now. Something sharper. Something colder."

Susanita looks down briefly at her own championship, fingers tightening around the strap.

Susanita Ybanez: "I know what's coming."

Susanita Ybanez: "I just don't know how far Troy's willing to go."

Marie Van Claudio: "Far enough."

Marie says it without hesitation.

Marie Van Claudio: "So be ready for that."

Marie Van Claudio: "Be ready for the version of Troy that thinks winning matters more than who they become doing it."

Susanita nods slowly. The weight of that lands.

Susanita Ybanez: "And you be ready for Amy."

Susanita Ybanez: "She's going to come at you like tonight decides the future."

Marie Van Claudio: "Because to her, it does."

Silence settles between them for a moment.

Not awkward silence.

The kind shared by two champions who both understand that nights like this are where titles either become more meaningful... or disappear forever.

John Phillips: "Both women know the stakes tonight."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. Two title matches. Two dangerous challengers. Two champions walking into fights that could redefine everything."

Susanita extends a hand.

Marie looks at it, then takes it.

Susanita Ybanez: "Then let's survive it."

Marie Van Claudio: "No."

Susanita raises an eyebrow.

Marie's eyes narrow with quiet fire.

Marie Van Claudio: "Let's win it."

The crowd in the distance can be heard faintly through the walls again, reminding both women that time is getting short.

Susanita gives one final nod, then turns for the door. Before stepping out, she glances back over her shoulder.

Susanita Ybanez: "Good luck, Marie."

Marie Van Claudio: "You too, champ."

Susanita exits.

Marie is alone again.

But the room feels different now.

She looks once more at the door, then at her title, then at her reflection in the mirror.

She rolls one shoulder, straightens the strap, and takes a long, steady breath.

John Phillips: "Marie Van Claudio is ready."

Mark Bravo: "And if she wasn't before, she is now."

The camera lingers on Marie for one last second—alone, composed, championship over her shoulder, the pressure of the night sitting right there with her—before the scene fades out.

All Roads Lead to This

Segment

The broadcast cuts to a darkened recap package.

Low, ominous music hums under the footage as the screen fills with cold blacks, sickly grays, and sharp flashes of Silas Grimm's expressionless stare.

John Phillips: "Up next, a collision born from warning, from violence, and from a Hall of Famer refusing to let his story end on someone else's terms."

Mark Bravo: "Silas Grimm didn't just pick a fight with Madman Szalinski. He stalked him. He insulted him. He dropped him. And then he found out the old man wasn't quite done yet."

The first shot in the package is backstage.

Madman Szalinski is celebrating with El Fantasma, all manic pride and Hall of Fame energy, until the locker room door opens and Silas Grimm steps inside.

The room changes immediately.

John Phillips: "It started with a warning. A cold, unsettling interruption at what should have been a celebration."

We see Grimm standing in the doorway, calm and disturbing, his eyes sliding past Madman and settling on El Fantasma.

Silas Grimm: "I am not here to speak to you."

Madman steps in front of his team.

Mark Bravo: "That was the first clue this was about more than just a cheap insult. Grimm wasn't looking for a conversation. He was looking to plant something ugly."

The footage cuts between Madman's face and Grimm's.

Silas Grimm: "It is amazing to me... that a washed up clown like you can be envisioned to headline a Hall of Fame."

Madman's expression hardens.

Silas Grimm: "More amazing still... that the forces of darkness surrounding them would allow your presence among them at all."

John Phillips: "Grimm wasn't just insulting Madman. He was threatening to tear away the very role Madman had carved out for himself beside El Fantasma."

The package shows Grimm backing toward the door, that thin, wrong smile creeping onto his face.

Silas Grimm: "Don't worry... we'll finish this another time."

Mark Bravo: "And that right there was the promise. Not a warning shot. A promise."

The music in the package builds.

Now we cut to the aftermath of El Fantasma's tag title loss. Madman is in the ring with his team, trying to steady them in defeat.

Then the lights flicker.

Fog rolls.

Silas Grimm appears.

John Phillips: "And one week later, Grimm came to collect on those words."

We see Grimm climbing the steps, entering the ring with ritual calm. No microphone. No theatrics beyond the eerie

certainty of his presence.

Madman Szalinski: "What do you want?!"

Grimm slowly points past him to El Fantasma.

Silas Grimm: "They deserve to be led by the darkness... not some... clown in a mask."

Madman throws his hands out in disbelief.

Madman Szalinski: "They freaking have masks too!"

Mark Bravo: "That was classic Madman. Even in the middle of a nightmare, he was still Madman."

Then the replay slows down.

Silas surges forward.

The lariat nearly takes Madman's head off.

Madman flips sideways and crashes hard to the mat.

John Phillips: "And that was the attack. Sudden. Violent. Ugly. Silas Grimm laid out a Hall of Famer in the center of the ring."

Mark Bravo: "No buildup. No cheap slap. No little message. He tried to erase him in one shot."

The footage shows Madman sprawled out while Grimm turns his attention to El Fantasma.

Silas Grimm: "Embrace your darkness."

Silas Grimm: "Join me."

John Phillips: "What followed was even more disturbing. Grimm stood over Madman and tried to take his team from him while he lay there helpless."

We see El Fantasma looking from Grimm... to Madman... then stepping forward to flank Grimm.

Mark Bravo: "That image said everything. Grimm standing tall. El Fantasma beside him. Madman down behind them. It felt like the end of something."

The music changes here. The tone lifts. The package transitions from dread to defiance.

Now we cut to Victory two weeks later.

The crowd is roaring as Madman Szalinski walks to the ring with a microphone in hand.

John Phillips: "But Grimm's attack did not end the story. It woke it back up."

We see Madman in the ring, soaking in the reaction before speaking.

Madman Szalinski: "Two weeks ago... I was laying in the center of this very ring..."

Mark Bravo: "And now came the challenge. But before he could issue it, Madman had to tell the world what happened after Grimm dropped him."

The package shows close-ups of Madman pacing, emotion building in his voice.

Madman Szalinski: "They told me there was nothin' I could do about it."

Madman Szalinski: "They told me my time in professional wrestling was done."

Madman Szalinski: "They told me I was lucky I even had the opportunity to be a manager at this point!"

John Phillips: "Madman was told he was finished. That his time as a physical competitor was over."

The crowd in the replay is hanging on every word.

Madman Szalinski: "You know what I told 'em?"

Madman Szalinski: "I told 'em they could all kiss my Parkersburg ass."

The crowd erupts in the package.

Mark Bravo: "And that was when you knew this wasn't gonna be some sad retirement speech."

The replay cuts tighter on Madman.

Madman Szalinski: "After two weeks... of testin'... proddin'... and pokin'..."

Madman Szalinski: "They told me..."

Madman Szalinski: "I was cleared."

The building in the replay explodes.

John Phillips: "That was the moment it all changed. Madman Szalinski wasn't just back on television. He was cleared to fight."

Mark Bravo: "And suddenly Silas Grimm didn't just have a ghost in his rearview. He had a live round coming straight at him."

The package shows Madman's expression shifting from vindicated to dangerous.

Madman Szalinski: "So Silas Grimm..."

Madman Szalinski: "When you put your hands on me two weeks ago..."

Madman Szalinski: "You made the biggest God damn mistake of your life, son."

We see the crowd chanting his name now.

Madman Szalinski: "Come Victorious..."

Madman Szalinski: "You're gonna see why these people are losing their minds right now..."

Madman Szalinski: "And exactly why they call me..."

The crowd in the replay takes it from there.

Crowd: "MADMAN! MADMAN! MADMAN! MADMAN!"

John Phillips: "The warning. The attack. The challenge. And now, tonight, the reckoning."

Mark Bravo: "Silas Grimm tried to bury a legend. Instead, he dug him back up."

The package ends on a split-screen visual.

On one side: Silas Grimm, expressionless, eyes dead and cold.

On the other: Madman Szalinski, fired up, mask on, microphone lowered, ready for one more war.

The screen flashes:

SILAS GRIMM vs. MADMAN SZALINSKI

NEXT

The replay package fades out.

Silas Grimm vs. Madman Szalinski

Match

The lights in the arena dim.

Not all the way.

Just enough that the energy inside the CHI Health Center begins to change.

The crowd is already buzzing from the video package that just aired, but that buzz now starts to turn into anticipation. A low murmur. A restless, electric waiting. The kind of sound that only happens when thousands of people know they are about to witness something they were never supposed to see again.

John Phillips: "We are moments away from Silas Grimm versus Madman Szalinski."

Mark Bravo: "And I'm telling you right now, this doesn't feel like just another match entrance. This feels bigger than that."

The camera cuts to the stage.

Nothing yet.

Then the first notes hit.

Madman Szalinski's music pounds through the building.

And the reaction is instant.

The CHI Health Center explodes.

John Phillips: "Listen to this ovation!"

Mark Bravo: "That is a return pop right there!"

The camera swings wide as fans leap to their feet all across the arena. Hands in the air. Mouths open. Signs shaking. Phones out. Some cheering like crazy. Some just frozen in disbelief that this is actually happening.

Then he appears.

Madman Szalinski steps through the curtain in his trademark mask and blue singlet, and the building somehow gets even louder.

There is no manager gear tonight. No jeans. No black t-shirt. No middle ground between past and present.

This is wrestler Madman Szalinski.

This is the version of him people thought was gone.

And the second he steps out into the light, you can see it all hit him at once.

John Phillips: "Oh my God..."

Mark Bravo: "Look at him."

Madman stops dead at the top of the stage.

His body goes still.

His chest rises.

His head turns slowly, taking in the sea of people on their feet for him.

The mask hides part of the emotion, but not all of it. Not even close. The way his shoulders lift. The way he exhales. The way one hand comes up to his chest like he needs to physically steady himself in the moment. This is not routine. This is not performance. This is a man standing inside a moment he was told he would never have again.

John Phillips: "This should not be happening. That is what makes this so powerful."

Mark Bravo: "Two weeks ago, people were telling him he was done. That the physical part of this business was over for him. And now he is standing on a premium live event stage in his gear, ready to fight."

The camera moves in closer.

Madman nods once to himself. Then again.

He looks out over the crowd and you can see the moisture in his eyes now, the emotion coming through no matter how hard he tries to keep it in. He smiles for half a second, not a goofy smile, not a comedic one, but the deeply human smile of a man who understands exactly how precious this is.

John Phillips: "There are moments in this business that transcend wins and losses. This is one of them."

Mark Bravo: "And the people know it. They are not just cheering a guy they like. They are cheering a second chance."

The fans begin chanting.

"MAD-MAN! MAD-MAN! MAD-MAN! MAD-MAN!"

Madman lowers his head for a moment and just listens.

Then he lifts it again, eyes locked ahead now, the emotion still there but changing shape. Settling. Becoming purpose.

He starts down the ramp.

John Phillips: "And now here he comes."

Mark Bravo: "I love this. No rush. No wasted motion. He's walking into this like a man who knows every single step matters."

Madman makes his way toward the ring, slapping hands along the barricade on both sides. The younger fans are absolutely losing their minds trying to reach him. Older fans are screaming his name. A few are openly emotional themselves, seeing a Hall of Famer walk this road one more time in fighting gear instead of a suit.

John Phillips: "There is history in every step he's taking right now."

Mark Bravo: "And there's a lot of people in this building thinking the same thing. We were not supposed to get this. Not again."

The camera catches Madman pausing halfway down the ramp.

He turns once and looks out into the crowd again.

The chant is still rolling.

He points out toward them, then to himself, then toward the ring.

The message is simple.

I hear you. I'm here. And I'm doing this.

John Phillips: "Madman Szalinski built a career out of madness, unpredictability, charisma, and heart. Tonight, heart may be the biggest thing he brings with him."

Mark Bravo: "He's gonna need all of it. Because this isn't some feel-good exhibition. This is Silas Grimm waiting in the other corner."

Madman reaches ringside and slows again, looking up at the ring apron.

For just a moment, the enormity of it all seems to hit him one more time.

He places both hands on the apron and closes his eyes briefly.

Maybe a prayer.

Maybe a thank you.

Maybe just one final breath before stepping back into a place he had been told was gone forever.

John Phillips: "What a scene."

Mark Bravo: "This is beautiful, man. I don't care who you are."

Madman opens his eyes and pounds the apron once with his palm. Then he rolls into the ring under the bottom rope and rises to his feet.

The ovation swells all over again.

Inside the ropes, in the blue singlet and the mask, he turns slowly in a circle, taking in every side of the arena. He is breathing hard already, not from exertion, but from the weight of the moment. He taps his chest twice, then raises both arms into the air.

John Phillips: "There he is. Madman Szalinski. In the ring. Ready to compete."

Mark Bravo: "Goosebumps. Absolute goosebumps."

The fans continue chanting his name as he lowers his arms and looks toward the stage now. The emotion has not left him. But it has sharpened. There is still gratitude in him. Still awe. Still that sense that this is a gift. But now, mixed into it, is something darker.

Silas Grimm did this.

Silas Grimm is why this is happening tonight.

And Silas Grimm is who has to answer for it.

John Phillips: "The moment is emotional. The meaning is undeniable. But let's not forget why we are here. Silas Grimm attacked this man. Silas Grimm tried to end this before it could ever begin."

Mark Bravo: "And now Madman gets to stand in this ring, look at that stage, and wait for the man who made the biggest mistake of his life."

Madman stands in the center now, mask on, blue singlet shining under the lights, shoulders squared, emotion still visible in every breath he takes.

The camera tightens on him one more time.

A Hall of Famer.

A survivor.

A man standing inside a moment that should have never come.

And yet here he is.

Waiting for Silas Grimm.

The arena remains dim.

Madman Szalinski stands alone in the ring now, still breathing in the aftermath of that impossible ovation, the crowd buzzing with adrenaline and emotion as they wait for the other side of this collision to arrive.

Then the lights cut even lower.

The warmth in the building disappears.

What replaces it is colder.

Heavier.

More wrong.

John Phillips: "And now... here comes Silas Grimm."

Mark Bravo: "The whole mood just changed."

A slow, rhythmic bell begins to toll through the CHI Health Center.

Once.

Then again.

Each echo seems to suck a little more air out of the room. A soft spotlight appears at the top of the stage, cutting through the darkness in a pale beam as smoke begins to rise from the floor in thin, creeping ribbons.

And then he appears.

Silas Grimm steps through the curtain in his hood and half-mask, moving with the same ritual calm that has made every one of his appearances feel less like an entrance and more like an omen. He does not play to the crowd. He does not acknowledge the boos. He does not so much as glance to either side.

His eyes are fixed on the ring.

On Madman.

John Phillips: "Silas Grimm enters like a man walking into ceremony."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and not the good kind. He looks like he's here to finish a ritual he started two weeks ago."

Behind him, shapes begin to emerge from the dark.

El Fantasma.

Oscuro 1 and Oscuro 2 step out and fall in behind Grimm, somehow feeling even darker and eerier than usual. They do not come with their usual aura of mysterious poise tonight. Tonight they feel haunted. Corrupted. Drawn into something larger and more unsettling simply by proximity to Silas Grimm.

John Phillips: "And look who is joining him."

Mark Bravo: "That is unsettling. Real unsettling."

John Phillips: "El Fantasma at Grimm's back. The same team Grimm tried to seduce away from Madman Szalinski after that attack. The same team whose darkness he claimed should follow him instead."

Madman in the ring does not take his eyes off the stage, but the sight of El Fantasma behind Grimm clearly registers. His jaw tightens. His shoulders rise. The emotional return is over now. The fight is here.

On the stage, Grimm stops at the center. El Fantasma fan out just behind him, one on each side, creating an image that feels more like a dark procession than a wrestling entrance.

Fog begins to pour more heavily across the stage floor, thickening at their feet and rising up around their legs.

Mark Bravo: "This feels like a nightmare visual. Grimm in front, El Fantasma behind him, and Madman standing alone in the ring waiting on all of it."

John Phillips: "Silas Grimm warned Madman. Then he attacked him. Then he watched as the world learned Madman

was cleared. Tonight he arrives looking like a man determined to correct that mistake himself."

The fog rises faster now, swallowing the stage from the floor up. Grimm remains perfectly still in the center of it, while El Fantasma stand like sentries beside and behind him.

Then, as the smoke becomes almost blinding beneath the spotlight, Oscuro 1 and Oscuro 2 slowly step back into the thickest part of it.

One shape disappears.

Then the other.

The fog swallows them whole.

John Phillips: "And just like that... El Fantasma vanish back into the mist."

Mark Bravo: "Like they were never really there to begin with."

When the fog thins just enough again, only Silas Grimm remains.

Alone.

Exactly where he belongs.

He slowly reaches up and removes the half-mask.

Then the hood.

His face underneath is carved from disdain. No smile. No wild eyes. No fury in the obvious sense. Just that deeply unsettling calm, like all of this has already happened in his mind and the man walking down the ramp now is merely following through on something inevitable.

John Phillips: "There is no joy in him. No theatrics for their own sake. Every movement means something to Silas Grimm."

Mark Bravo: "And tonight what it means is simple. He wants to end Madman for good."

Grimm begins his walk to the ring.

Slow.

Steady.

Purposeful.

He does not look left or right. He does not pace for dramatic effect. He does not milk the reaction. Every step is direct. Every step is aimed at the ring like a man closing in on unfinished business.

John Phillips: "This is not the walk of a man trying to win a match. This is the walk of a man trying to complete a sentence."

Mark Bravo: "And the sentence is ugly. He doesn't want revenge. He doesn't want attention. He wants closure. The sick kind."

The camera cuts to Madman in the ring.

He has not moved much. He stands squared to the ramp, eyes locked on Grimm, every bit of the earlier emotion now channeled into focus. He watches Grimm approach like a man seeing the thing that stole his peace come back for one more bite.

Back to Grimm.

He reaches ringside without hesitation.

He pauses only long enough to look up at Madman through the ropes.

Their eyes meet.

The crowd noise swells from unease into open hostility, but Grimm doesn't blink. Doesn't sneer. Doesn't perform.

He simply stares.

John Phillips: "There it is. The stare. Madman Szalinski and Silas Grimm finally face to face again."

Mark Bravo: "And Silas looks exactly like a man who wants to put this legend back on the shelf permanently."

Grimm ascends the steps with measured control and steps onto the apron. One hand on the top rope. Head tilted just slightly. His eyes never leave Madman.

Then he steps into the ring.

The bell has not rung yet.

The crowd is loud.

But the ring itself suddenly feels silent.

Two men stand inside it now.

One emotional because he should not be here and fought like hell for the chance to return.

The other cold because he wants to make that return mean nothing.

John Phillips: "Madman Szalinski versus Silas Grimm. It is no longer theory. It is no longer challenge. It is real."

Mark Bravo: "And if Grimm has his way, he won't just beat Madman tonight. He'll finish him."

Silas Grimm slowly backs into his corner, never looking away.

Madman adjusts his stance across from him.

The stage is set.

The referee steps between them one last time, looking from one corner to the other as the atmosphere inside the CHI Health Center tightens into something almost unbearable.

John Phillips: "This one has felt different from the moment Madman Szalinski walked through the curtain."

Mark Bravo: "Because it is different. This ain't nostalgia. This ain't a cameo. This is a Hall of Famer stepping back into the fire against a man who wants to put him out for good."

Madman stands in his corner, still emotional but no longer overwhelmed by it. The tears are gone now. What remains is resolve. He bounces lightly on the balls of his feet, his blue singlet catching the light as he rolls his neck once and brings his hands up. Across the ring, Silas Grimm barely moves at all, save for the slight tilt of his head and the slow flex of his fingers.

John Phillips: "You can feel the contrast. Madman Szalinski is heart and history and emotion. Silas Grimm is cold purpose."

Mark Bravo: "And the scary part is both of those things can win fights."

The referee calls for the bell.

DING DING DING!

John Phillips: "And here we go!"

The crowd rises again, a wave of noise pushing into the match before a single hand is laid on either man. Madman takes one step out of his corner, then another, hands up, eyes locked on Grimm. Silas does the same, but slower, almost gliding, his expression unreadable.

Mark Bravo: "Listen to this place. They're hanging on every step."

They begin circling.

Madman gives a little shoulder feint first, testing. Grimm does not bite. Madman inches in, then out, trying to find a rhythm. Grimm simply watches him, studying the returner's posture, breathing, foot placement, looking less like a wrestler starting a match and more like a surgeon deciding where to cut first.

John Phillips: "Silas Grimm is in no hurry at all."

Mark Bravo: "That's because he wants this to feel bad. He wants every second to sit in Madman's head."

Madman claps his hands together once and motions Grimm forward.

Madman Szalinski: "Come on then."

Grimm steps in.

They tie up.

It is not a wild collision. It is tense, grinding, full of resistance and feeling-out pressure. Grimm immediately tries to angle off, turning the lock-up sideways and forcing Madman to reset his feet. Madman holds firm and drives back, surprising Grimm with his base. For a moment they are deadlocked in the center.

John Phillips: "Good leverage from Madman Szalinski right there!"

Mark Bravo: "That's the thing. He may be emotional, but he didn't come in here unprepared."

Grimm changes levels subtly, slipping an arm inside and turning the tie-up into a side headlock. He cinches it tight, wrenching down with methodical pressure, trying to slow Madman immediately. Madman grits his teeth, plants his boots, and fires a pair of short body shots into Grimm's ribs before shoving him off toward the ropes.

Grimm rebounds.

Madman drops low early.

Grimm steps over him.

Back to the ropes.

Madman pops up looking for a hip toss on the return—

but Grimm blocks it, shifts his weight, and snaps off a sharp palm strike to the side of Madman's head.

John Phillips: "Palm strike by Grimm!"

Mark Bravo: "That'll reset your whole soul."

Madman stumbles half a step but comes right back with a forearm of his own, then another, forcing Grimm backward. The crowd comes alive behind every shot. Madman whips Grimm to the ropes again and this time catches him with a deep back elbow that drops him flat on the canvas.

John Phillips: "Madman with the back elbow!"

Mark Bravo: "And that looked like old Madman right there!"

The crowd erupts. Madman pumps a fist without playing to them too long, then grabs Grimm by the wrist and jerks him back up. He shoots him across the ring once more, this time lowering his shoulder on the rebound and nearly turning Grimm inside out with a hard shoulder tackle. Grimm rolls through to one knee, more annoyed than rattled, but Madman is feeling it now.

John Phillips: "Madman Szalinski is rolling early!"

Mark Bravo: "He came to prove he still belongs in this ring and right now he is doing exactly that!"

Madman hits the ropes and comes back with the first of the Tecmo Elbows, a running smash to the side of Grimm's head that knocks him over onto his back. The crowd pops huge. Madman spins, hits the opposite ropes again, and lands a second Tecmo Elbow as Grimm tries to sit up.

John Phillips: "Tecmo Elbows!"

Mark Bravo: "Vintage Madman!"

Madman rises and the crowd is roaring with him now. He points down at Grimm, then looks around as the energy swells. For a second, it is impossible not to feel it: this is a man rediscovering himself in real time.

John Phillips: "That sound you're hearing is belief."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and Silas Grimm might be realizing this ain't gonna be as simple as finishing off a memory."

Madman reaches down for Grimm again, trying to haul him up by the arm, but Grimm suddenly fires a vicious short kick into the side of the knee. Madman buckles. Grimm follows immediately with a dragon screw leg whip, snapping Madman down to the mat and turning the emotion of the moment into a painful reality check.

John Phillips: "Dragon screw by Grimm!"

Mark Bravo: "There it is. Find a weakness. Dissect it. That's how Grimm works."

Grimm rises with a sneer now, the first real crack in his stoic mask. He circles around Madman's legs once, then stomps directly into the hamstring before grabbing the ankle and twisting. Madman reaches up, trying to kick him away with the free leg, but Grimm only tightens the hold and leans into the pain.

John Phillips: "Silas Grimm wasting no time attacking the leg."

Mark Bravo: "Because if Madman can't plant, he can't throw those elbows, he can't get momentum, and all that comeback energy dries up real fast."

Madman muscles his way up to a seated position and clubs Grimm across the shoulder with a forearm, then another. Grimm lets go just long enough for Madman to drag himself up using the ropes, but the damage is done. He's limping now. Grimm sees it. Of course he does.

Grimm steps in slowly, almost savoring it, and flicks a quick kick at the same leg again. Madman checks it this time and fires a right hand over the top. Grimm absorbs it, answers with a rolling elbow to the jaw, and suddenly Madman is rocked backward into the corner.

John Phillips: "Rolling elbow from Silas Grimm!"

Mark Bravo: "That one landed flush."

Grimm closes in and unloads with a measured palm strike barrage in the corner. Not wild. Not sloppy. Every shot precise. Chest. Jaw. Ear. Shoulder. Madman covers up and tries to fire back, but Grimm controls the tempo, stepping just outside each return and cracking him again before he can reset.

John Phillips: "This is that pain psychology we talk about with Grimm. Nothing wasted. Everything chosen."

Mark Bravo: "He's not trying to overwhelm Madman. He's trying to peel him apart."

The referee starts a count as Grimm keeps him pinned in the corner. Grimm finally backs off at four, but only by a step. Madman stumbles forward out of the turnbuckles, and Grimm hooks him immediately in a cravate, trying to snap him over into a suplex. Madman blocks it once. Grimm yanks again. Madman drops his weight and throws a shot to the body.

John Phillips: "Madman fighting it!"

Madman throws another body shot, then shoves Grimm backward enough to create space. The crowd roars and Madman tries to burst forward—

but Grimm catches him coming in with a spinning back kick right to the stomach.

Mark Bravo: "Oof."

John Phillips: "Right to the midsection!"

Madman folds over and Grimm immediately snaps his head under the arm again, this time completing the cravate suplex and throwing Madman over hard to the mat. Madman lands ugly and rolls toward the ropes, clutching the back of his neck and shoulder while Grimm stays on one knee for just a second, staring at him with that same unsettling calm.

John Phillips: "Cravate suplex by Silas Grimm!"

Mark Bravo: "And now Grimm has the match exactly where he wants it. Slow, painful, uncomfortable."

The crowd begins trying to rally Madman back into it, clapping in rhythm, calling his name. Madman grabs the middle rope and starts to pull himself upward. Grimm takes his time stalking after him, tilting his head slightly as if deciding which part of Madman he wants to ruin next.

John Phillips: "Madman Szalinski had that early burst. He gave this crowd reason to believe. But Silas Grimm has dragged this fight into darker water."

Mark Bravo: "And Madman better find another answer quick, because Grimm looks like he's settling in for the long hurt."

Madman reaches one knee. Grimm steps in behind him, one hand on the shoulder, one at the jawline, already beginning to pull him into another hold.

The fight is only getting started.

Madman Szalinski is still on one knee, one hand on the middle rope, the other braced against the mat as he tries to steady himself. Behind him, Silas Grimm places one hand coldly on the shoulder and the other along the jawline, beginning to pull him backward into another one of those suffocating control holds.

John Phillips: "Grimm right back on him."

Mark Bravo: "That's how these guys beat you. No fireworks. No wasted motion. Just one bad place after another until you stop having answers."

Grimm cinches in a standing neck stretch from behind, dragging Madman upward just enough to make him feel all the torque through the neck and upper back before dropping his weight again. Madman grimaces hard, hands clawing at the wrist, boots scrambling for leverage as the crowd tries to will him loose.

John Phillips: "Silas Grimm attacking the neck now, and remember how Madman landed off that cravate suplex."

Mark Bravo: "That's not random. None of this is random. Grimm saw where he landed and went hunting."

Madman fights to his feet in stages. First one leg. Then the other. Grimm keeps the hold, wrenching it tighter, but Madman begins throwing short elbows backward. One catches Grimm in the ribs. Another glances off the side of the head. A third lands clean enough to force Grimm to loosen his grip and step away.

John Phillips: "Madman with the elbows!"

Madman spins around and throws a right hand. Grimm blocks it high and answers with a knife-like palm strike to the chest. Madman winces but surges forward anyway with another forearm, then another, forcing Grimm backward toward the ropes.

Mark Bravo: "That's heart right there. Maybe more heart than sense, but heart all the same."

Madman whips Grimm across the ring and takes off after him, looking to keep the pressure on. Grimm rebounds, and Madman tries to catch him with another Tecmo Elbow—

but Grimm ducks under it at the last second.

Madman hits the ropes, turns back around, and walks right into a running basement knee to the jaw.

John Phillips: "Dead Air! Dead Air by Grimm!"

Mark Bravo: "That one folded him up!"

Madman crumples to the mat on his side, one arm reaching instinctively toward the ropes, eyes blinking hard as he tries to clear his vision. Grimm does not cover. He doesn't even look tempted. He kneels beside Madman and places one hand flat on the back of his head like a priest preparing a final rite.

John Phillips: "No pin attempt."

Mark Bravo: "Because Grimm doesn't want quick. He wants complete."

Grimm hauls Madman up again, but not all the way. He hangs him throat-first across the middle rope, then steps out to the apron with eerie calm. The crowd starts buzzing nervously because they can see the setup before Madman even knows where he is.

John Phillips: "Wait a second..."

Mark Bravo: "This is bad."

Grimm grips Madman by the head and shoulder from the apron, then drops backward, snapping him violently against the rope-hung neckbreaker he calls the Sorrow Spiral. Madman spills backward into the ring clutching at the neck as the fans groan.

John Phillips: "Sorrow Spiral!"

Mark Bravo: "That is exactly what I mean. It's all surgical with this guy."

Grimm re-enters through the ropes and finally makes a cover, but only because the damage is right there to be counted now. He hooks one leg lazily, expression still flat.

Referee: "One! Two!"

Madman kicks out.

John Phillips: "Madman Szalinski stays in it!"

Mark Bravo: "And listen to the people. They are trying to carry him through this."

The crowd chants again, louder this time, trying to inject life back into the Hall of Famer. Grimm rises, annoyed only in the smallest sense, and looks down at Madman with that carved sneer. He reaches down and hooks both wrists,

dragging Madman up into a seated position before driving a stomp into the spine.

John Phillips: "Every inch of Grimm's offense is about punishment."

Mark Bravo: "And message. Don't forget that. He wanted to finish Madman once already. This whole match feels like him trying to prove the first time should've been the last."

Grimm drags Madman toward center ring and starts to weave his legs, teasing the setup for a more dangerous hold. Madman senses it and begins kicking free immediately, scrambling and twisting before Grimm can fully trap him. The movement isn't pretty, but it's enough to break the rhythm.

John Phillips: "Good survival instincts by Madman there!"

Madman rolls to the ropes and uses them to stand again, but he is clearly hurting now. He's slower. He's favoring the leg Grimm attacked earlier. His neck and shoulders are tightening. Grimm sees all of it.

Grimm charges in to keep him pinned in the corner, but Madman gets one boot up just in time, catching Grimm square in the chest. Grimm stumbles back two steps. Madman, feeding off the reaction, steps out of the corner and throws a wild right hand, then another, then a third that sends sweat flying from Grimm's face.

John Phillips: "Madman firing back!"

Mark Bravo: "He needed that in the worst way!"

Madman whips Grimm toward the ropes again. Grimm rebounds and this time Madman nails him with a full Tecmo Elbow, then keeps moving and hits the opposite ropes for a second. Grimm gets to a knee just in time to eat another. The crowd explodes.

John Phillips: "Tecmo Elbows again!"

Mark Bravo: "That's where Madman feels alive! When he can get moving, when he can get weird, when he can let the crowd pull him through it!"

Madman points toward the corner now, adrenaline surging. He grabs Grimm by the arm and tries to sling him across the ring for something bigger, but Grimm plants his boots and yanks back. Madman tries again, this time with both hands, and Grimm uses the resistance to pull him in close and fire a sharp headbutt to the bridge of the nose.

John Phillips: "Oh! Headbutt from Grimm!"

Madman stumbles backward glassy-eyed. Grimm immediately looks for the hammerlock, trying to cinch Madman up for Last Rites. He gets one arm trapped. Then the second almost halfway. Madman's posture changes instantly, his body recognizing danger before his face does.

Mark Bravo: "No no no—he's looking for Last Rites!"

John Phillips: "This could end it!"

Grimm starts to lift.

Madman kicks his legs wildly.

One heel clips Grimm in the shin. Then another stomps down hard on the foot. Grimm loses enough balance for Madman to twist free and spin out to the side. The crowd roars.

John Phillips: "Madman escaped!"

Madman does not waste the opening. He grabs Grimm around the head and neck and jumps, pulling him down into a front guillotine while throwing his legs around the waist in full guard.

John Phillips: "Deathtrap!"

Mark Bravo: "HE GOT IT!"

The building comes alive all over again as Madman squeezes with everything he has left, face twisted in effort. Grimm's eyes widen for the first time all match. He didn't see this coming. One hand reaches for Madman's wrists. The other posts against the mat. Madman tightens the hold again, chin buried, body coiled around Grimm like he's trying to will the oxygen right out of him.

John Phillips: "Grimm is trapped in the Deathtrap! Front guillotine with full guard, and Madman has it locked in tight!"

Mark Bravo: "This is huge! This is exactly the kind of scramble hold that can change a whole fight!"

Grimm shifts his weight, trying to stay calm, trying not to panic. Madman squeezes harder and the crowd starts clapping in rhythm again, sensing this could be the turning point. Grimm crawls inch by inch, trying to get his hips under him. Madman adjusts and cranks the neck tighter. Grimm's face goes red. His free leg kicks once against the mat.

John Phillips: "You can see the pressure! Grimm is in real trouble here!"

Mark Bravo: "Madman has him! Madman has him dead center!"

Grimm suddenly changes strategy. Instead of pulling backward, he drives forward, stacking Madman up against his own shoulders. Madman keeps the choke, but now the angle is compromised. Grimm muscles another inch, then another, until he can slam Madman's upper back against the mat with his full weight behind it.

John Phillips: "Grimm trying to break the hold by stacking him!"

Madman keeps it for one more heartbeat. Then another.

Then Grimm drives him down again, heavier this time.

The grip loosens.

Grimm tears his head free and rolls backward toward the ropes, coughing hard while Madman lies on the mat grabbing at his own lower back and neck from the impact.

Mark Bravo: "He escaped it, but not clean!"

John Phillips: "No, not clean at all! That may be the first time all night Silas Grimm has looked genuinely rattled!"

The crowd is at a fever pitch now, both men down for a moment, both breathing hard, both recalibrating after the biggest near-swing of the match so far.

John Phillips: "Madman Szalinski just reminded everyone in this building that he is not here for a symbolic return. He is here to win."

Mark Bravo: "And Grimm just got a very ugly reminder that old dogs still know where the throat is."

Grimm pulls himself up using the ropes. Madman does the same on the opposite side, slower now, shaking feeling back into one leg and trying to stretch out the neck Grimm has spent the first half of the match punishing. They turn toward each other again.

The crowd rises.

The fight has entered another phase.

Silas Grimm and Madman Szalinski pull themselves upright at opposite sides of the ring, both men breathing hard now, both worn in very different ways. Grimm's composure has a crack in it for the first time all night. Madman's body is laboring, but the crowd has poured something into him that wasn't there at the opening bell.

John Phillips: "This match has shifted."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. Grimm still has the control, the damage, the strategy... but now he knows Madman can catch him. And Madman knows he belongs."

The two men step in at the same time.

No tie-up now.

No feeling out.

Madman throws a forearm.

Grimm answers with a palm strike.

Madman with another forearm.

Grimm with a stiff elbow to the jaw.

John Phillips: "Now they are just trading in the middle of the ring!"

Mark Bravo: "This is where emotion takes over. This is where all the planning gets replaced by pure refusal."

Madman throws again and this one catches Grimm clean enough to turn his head. The crowd roars. Grimm looks back slowly, sneer returning, and cracks Madman across the chest with a palm strike that echoes through the arena. Madman winces, then barks something at him that the camera doesn't quite catch and fires another forearm.

John Phillips: "Madman refusing to give ground!"

Grimm suddenly changes the angle, stepping inside and chopping out the previously targeted leg. Madman drops to one knee. Grimm hits the ropes and comes back with a running knee aimed right at the jaw again—

but Madman drops under it at the last second and rolls through behind him.

Grimm turns.

Madman explodes upward with a clothesline that knocks Grimm backward into the ropes.

Mark Bravo: "He caught him!"

John Phillips: "Big clothesline by Madman Szalinski!"

Grimm rebounds off the ropes and walks straight into a second one, this one taking him down to a knee. Madman stumbles forward himself from the effort, but the crowd is up and carrying him again. He points toward the ropes, then toward Grimm, then takes off.

He hits the ropes and comes back for another Tecmo Elbow—

Grimm pops up just in time and catches him flush with a spinning back kick to the body.

John Phillips: "Right to the ribs!"

Mark Bravo: "That one stopped the whole sequence cold!"

Madman doubles over and Grimm immediately wraps him up from the side, looking for control again. He yanks him forward and plants him with a snap neckbreaker, then rolls through into a seated position and traps the arm, grinding a knee between the shoulder blades while pulling the neck backward at a horrible angle.

John Phillips: "Grimm turning that into another neck-and-shoulder attack!"

Mark Bravo: "He never leaves the target, John. Ever."

Madman reaches for the ropes but they're too far away. He tries to twist out, but Grimm keeps the angle ugly, forcing him to carry his own weight in the wrong direction. The referee asks if he wants to give it up. Madman snarls and

shakes his head.

Madman Szalinski: "No!"

John Phillips: "Madman not quitting!"

He drives an elbow backward into Grimm's thigh. Then another. Then a third. Grimm lets go just enough for Madman to twist and kick loose, and both men separate by a few feet. Grimm rises first and charges in, looking to reestablish control, but Madman drops his shoulder and back body drops him over the top rope.

Grimm lands on the apron instead.

The crowd gasps.

Mark Bravo: "Not out!"

Madman turns and sees Grimm still there. Grimm slingshots himself back in with a forearm aimed for the side of the head—

but Madman ducks it, catches the arm on the way through, and spins underneath.

For one glorious, insane second, it looks like he's trying it.

John Phillips: "No way... no way..."

Madman tries to power through the motion for the Scoopstone, turning his hips and trying to elevate Grimm for the tilt-a-whirl belly-to-belly piledriver.

The crowd is losing its mind at the possibility.

Mark Bravo: "He's trying to hit the Scoopstone!"

But Grimm fights it instantly, hooking his leg around Madman's and shifting his weight sideways before Madman can get him up. Grimm lands on his feet, grabs the arm, and yanks Madman straight into a rolling elbow to the jaw.

John Phillips: "Countered!"

Mark Bravo: "Madman almost had him, but almost gets you knocked silly against Silas Grimm!"

Madman stumbles backward on instinct, legs unsteady. Grimm follows with a hard palm strike to the chest, then a second to the jaw, then a third. He drives Madman into the corner and begins unloading that palm strike barrage again, every shot choosing a different place to hurt. Chest. Jaw. Ear. Sternum. Throat line. The referee steps in to warn him, but Grimm only tilts his head and fires one final strike before backing away.

John Phillips: "That barrage is brutal."

Mark Bravo: "And it looks like it takes nothing out of him to do it."

Madman falls out of the corner, trying to stay on his feet. Grimm sees the opening and hooks him around the head and arm once more, this time lifting for the Witchhook.

John Phillips: "Witchhook! He's looking for it!"

Grimm gets Madman partially up. Madman kicks his legs. Twists. Fights. He slips just enough off the angle to avoid being planted cleanly and falls behind Grimm instead. The landing jars him badly, but he's still upright. Grimm turns around and swings immediately—

Madman catches him flush with a desperate right hand.

Then another.

Then a third that sends Grimm backward two full steps.

Mark Bravo: "Madman with pure guts right now!"

John Phillips: "He knew he was half a second from losing that match!"

Madman grabs Grimm by the wrist and fires him to the ropes. Grimm rebounds. Madman scoops him on instinct this time, not for the full Scoopstone, but enough to turn with him and drop him hard across the knee with a scoop slam variation that bounces Grimm awkwardly to the mat. The crowd pops huge anyway because it creates separation and momentum.

John Phillips: "Madman needed something, and he found it!"

Madman does not waste time. He stumbles toward the nearest corner and begins climbing. The audience rises as one because they know what this means. It's risky. It's dangerous. It may be stupid given his condition.

It also might work.

Mark Bravo: "No way. No way. He is not..."

John Phillips: "Madman heading up top!"

Madman reaches the top turnbuckle slowly, every movement showing the wear in his leg and neck, but once he gets there he steadies himself and looks down at Grimm. For a heartbeat the whole building holds its breath.

Mark Bravo: "If he hits this..."

Madman leaps.

Shooting Star Senton.

X-Buster.

He rotates beautifully—not as fast as he once did, not as crisp as in his prime, but with enough heart and timing to make it count.

And he lands across Grimm's body.

John Phillips: "X-BUSTER!"

Mark Bravo: "HE HIT IT! HE HIT THE DAMN THING!"

The building detonates. Madman clutches at his ribs from the impact too, but instinct and adrenaline carry him into the cover. He hooks the leg.

Referee: "One! Two!"

Grimm kicks out.

John Phillips: "No! Not enough!"

Mark Bravo: "But that was close! That was real close!"

Madman rolls to his back for a second, staring at the lights, trying to will more oxygen into himself. The crowd is thunderous now, clapping, chanting, urging him onward. Grimm is rolling toward the ropes on instinct, dragging himself there because some part of him knows staying in the center is death right now.

John Phillips: "Madman Szalinski just reached deep into the bag and pulled out one of the biggest weapons he has ever had."

Mark Bravo: "And that means this thing is now living in dangerous territory for both men. Madman knows he can hurt

Grimm. Grimm knows Madman's not bluffing."

Madman gets to his knees first. Grimm uses the ropes to stand, his breathing no longer as measured, his hair hanging down over his face, the disdain replaced by something meaner now. More personal. More urgent.

They see each other again.

And for the second time in the match, the ring feels too small for the amount of fight left between them.

Madman Szalinski and Silas Grimm are both back on their feet now, but the match has changed. Grimm is no longer gliding through his violence untouched. Madman is no longer just surviving the return. Both men have wounded the other, and both know it.

John Phillips: "This thing has become a war of attrition."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and now you're at the point where one weird thing, one desperate thing, one ugly thing can decide the whole match."

Grimm wipes a strand of hair from his face and steps in again, this time with no ritual calm. He throws a palm strike. Madman blocks it and answers with a right hand. Grimm swings with the rolling elbow—Madman ducks and throws a forearm to the back of the neck. Grimm stumbles forward, catches himself on the ropes, and turns right into another shot from Madman that sends him through the ropes to the apron.

John Phillips: "Madman has him reeling!"

Madman doesn't hesitate. He limps forward and reaches for Grimm through the ropes, trying to drag him back inside for more punishment. Grimm grabs the top rope with one hand and snaps a shoulder into Madman's midsection through the strands, forcing the Hall of Famer back a half-step. Grimm steps in through the ropes again and immediately looks for another spinning back kick—

but Madman catches the leg.

Mark Bravo: "Uh oh!"

The crowd comes alive as Madman holds the leg, gritting his teeth through his own pain. Grimm hops once, then again, trying to free himself. Madman yanks him inward and clubs him across the chest with a forearm before shoving him backward hard into the corner.

John Phillips: "Silas Grimm finally getting pushed onto his heels!"

Madman charges in and crushes Grimm with a corner splash. The impact sends Grimm sagging, and Madman immediately peppers him with body shots and forearms, the crowd roaring with each one. He pulls Grimm out of the corner by the wrist and starts dragging him toward center ring, maybe thinking deathtrap again, maybe thinking something else entirely.

Mark Bravo: "Madman feels it. He knows Grimm is vulnerable for the first time in this match!"

And that is when the lights flicker.

Just once.

Then again.

The crowd sound changes immediately, confusion rippling through the building as Madman stops mid-motion and looks toward the stage.

John Phillips: "Wait a second..."

Mark Bravo: "No. No, don't do this."

Fog begins to spill over the stage again.

At first there is nothing in it.

Then two shapes form.

El Fantasma.

Oscuro 1 and Oscuro 2 step out of the smoke and onto the stage together, still and silent, somehow even more eerie now than before. They do not rush. They do not pose. They simply appear, like a nightmare returning to the exact place it left off.

John Phillips: "El Fantasma have reappeared!"

Mark Bravo: "This is bad. This is real bad."

The camera cuts to Madman in the ring. He has gone completely still, eyes locked on the stage. The confusion on his face is immediate, but worse than confusion is hurt. Genuine hurt. He does not understand what he is seeing yet, but some part of him already knows it cannot be good.

John Phillips: "Remember what happened after Grimm attacked Madman. He offered darkness. He offered allegiance. And now here comes El Fantasma in the middle of this match."

Mark Bravo: "And whether they're here for Grimm or against him, the damage is already done. Madman is distracted."

Grimm sees it too.

Of course he does.

Madman turns back a half-second too late and eats a brutal palm strike right to the throat line, followed immediately by a spinning back kick to the ribs that folds him over. Grimm grabs the front facelock, hooks the arm, and plants him with a snap DDT variation that bounces Madman hard onto the mat.

John Phillips: "Grimm capitalizes!"

Mark Bravo: "That's exactly what I meant! One distraction! One look away! That's all it takes!"

Grimm rises over Madman and turns his head toward the stage.

El Fantasma have reached the end of the ramp now.

They stop there.

They do not come closer.

They simply stand in the fog and the shadow, watching.

Watching Madman.

Watching Grimm.

Watching the pain.

John Phillips: "They're not entering the ring. They're not rushing in. They're just... watching."

Mark Bravo: "That somehow makes it worse."

Madman pushes up to all fours, coughing and grabbing at his throat. He looks toward the stage again, trying to make sense of the image of his former team standing there like ghosts at the edge of this fight. Grimm circles him slowly, predatory again now, then drives a sharp knee into the side of the head to knock him back down.

John Phillips: "Silas Grimm is feeding off this!"

Grimm drags Madman up and whispers something in his ear that the cameras don't catch. Madman's face twists, part rage and part disbelief, and he swings wildly at Grimm with a right hand. Grimm slips it, traps the arm, and hammers him with another rolling elbow that drops him to a knee.

Mark Bravo: "Madman is fighting angry now. Dangerous, yes. Also sloppy."

Grimm steps behind him and begins the setup.

Full nelson fake-out.

Dragon screw angle.

Neck-stretch elbow crank.

John Phillips: "Black Ritual! He's setting up Black Ritual!"

The crowd starts screaming for Madman to move, to fight, to do anything. On the stage, El Fantasma remain absolutely motionless, silhouettes framed by fog and dim light. Madman, still on one knee, sees them again out of the corner of his eye while Grimm twists him into position.

Madman Szalinski: "Why?!"

The shout is toward the stage, not toward Grimm.

That hesitation costs him.

Grimm snaps the dragon screw through, then cranks the neck and shoulder at the elbow, wrenching Madman down into the setup. Madman cries out and falls flat, clutching at the side of his neck.

John Phillips: "Black Ritual connects!"

Mark Bravo: "And now Grimm is smelling blood."

Grimm does not cover. He kneels beside Madman and tilts his head, looking from the fallen Hall of Famer to the silent figures on the stage and back again. The sneer is back. The ritual calm is back. This is exactly the kind of suffering he wanted.

John Phillips: "This is turning into something darker than a wrestling match now."

Mark Bravo: "Because Grimm wanted to end Madman physically. But this? This is him trying to break his heart while he does it."

Grimm hooks Madman again, this time looking for the finish. He gets the arm trapped, reaches deep around the head and neck, and begins turning him into the twisting reverse fisherman position for the Witchhook.

John Phillips: "Witchhook! He's got him!"

The crowd rises and screams for Madman to fight. Madman's legs kick. His free arm flails once, then twice. He cannot break the position. Grimm tightens the hold and starts the turn.

And finally, finally, there is movement from the stage.

El Fantasma step forward one pace.

Mark Bravo: "What are they doing?!"

Madman sees them.

Grimm sees them.

And in that split second of mutual attention, Madman throws everything he has left into a desperate backward

headbutt.

It catches Grimm flush in the mouth.

John Phillips: "Madman broke free!"

Grimm stumbles. Madman spins around and throws a wild clothesline. Grimm ducks. Madman hits the ropes and comes back with one last burst of madness, trying to leap into another Tecmo Elbow—

but Grimm catches him on the way in.

Both hands.

One to the head. One to the arm.

He twists.

And plants him.

John Phillips: "WITCHHOOK!"

Mark Bravo: "HE SPIKED HIM!"

Madman Szalinski is driven down hard, the twist of the move dumping him violently onto the back of the neck and shoulders. The ring shakes on impact. The crowd gasps as one. Grimm rolls through and hooks the leg deep.

Referee: "One! Two! Thre—"

Madman kicks out.

The building erupts.

John Phillips: "NO! HE KICKED OUT!"

Mark Bravo: "Madman Szalinski is still alive!"

Grimm sits back on his knees for the first time all match, stunned. Not screaming, not ranting, just staring at the referee with disbelief. On the stage, El Fantasma do not react outwardly, but they also do not leave.

John Phillips: "Witchhook should have ended it!"

Mark Bravo: "And somehow, some way, this old lunatic is still fighting!"

Grimm slowly turns his head toward the stage again. El Fantasma stand there, unreadable. Then back to Madman. The Hall of Famer is barely moving, chest heaving, body wrecked, but he is not beaten.

The crowd begins chanting again.

"MAD-MAN! MAD-MAN! MAD-MAN!"

Grimm rises to his feet with a look that has now fully changed from ritual control to cold hatred. He is done proving points. Done sending messages. He wants this over.

John Phillips: "Silas Grimm thought he had him."

Mark Bravo: "And now I think he realizes he may need something even uglier."

Grimm reaches down for Madman again as the eerie presence of El Fantasma remains at the edge of the fight, turning an already haunted match into something far more disturbing.

Silas Grimm stands over Madman Szalinski now, breathing harder than before, but with none of the satisfaction he expected. Madman is still moving. Barely. Broken down, neck tortured, leg compromised, body battered, but still fighting through instinct and pride alone.

John Phillips: "Silas Grimm has thrown so much at Madman Szalinski tonight, and somehow he still has not been able to keep him down."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, but look at the stage. Look at the ramp. This thing is starting to feel less like a match and more like a takeover."

At the end of the ramp, half in the fog and half in the light, El Fantasma remain motionless. Oscuro 1. Oscuro 2. Still. Watching. Waiting. Their presence hangs over the match like an omen, and the crowd has gone from roaring to buzzing with genuine unease.

In the ring, Grimm reaches down and drags Madman up again by the head and shoulder. Madman can barely stand. Grimm pulls him into another front facelock and glances toward the stage, as if inviting the silent witness of El Fantasma to watch what comes next.

John Phillips: "This is exactly what Madman never wanted. Not just to be beaten... but to be abandoned while it happens."

Mark Bravo: "And Grimm knows it. He's trying to turn the knife now."

Grimm jerks Madman upright, one hand at the jaw, one at the back of the head, and whispers something in his ear again. Madman shoves weakly at Grimm's chest, but there is no force behind it anymore. Grimm sneers and clubs him across the upper back, dropping Madman to one knee.

Silas Grimm: "Look at them."

Madman doesn't want to.

But Grimm grabs his chin and forces his face toward the stage.

Silas Grimm: "Look."

The crowd grows louder again, not in excitement, but in discomfort, in anger, in that deep emotional churn that comes when a moment feels genuinely wrong.

John Phillips: "This is disturbing."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. Grimm wants to humiliate him in front of his own ghosts."

Madman stares toward the stage through pain and confusion. El Fantasma still haven't moved. Still haven't spoken. Still haven't helped.

Then the lights cut.

Not a flicker this time.

A full cut.

The whole arena drops into darkness.

John Phillips: "What now?!"

Mark Bravo: "Wait a second..."

For one heartbeat there is nothing but the sound of the crowd gasping in the dark.

Then a new theme rips through the building.

"Down" by Yelawolf.

The reaction is not instant at first.

It is delayed by disbelief.

By confusion.

By thousands of people trying to process whether what they are hearing is even real.

Then the stage explodes.

John Phillips: "NO WAY!"

Mark Bravo: "NO! NO! IT CAN'T BE!"

Gold and white light blast across the stage as the fog is shredded apart by the sudden eruption of sound and color. And standing in the center of it, framed like an impossible memory dragged into the present, is La Flama Blanca.

The CHI Health Center loses its mind.

Not cheers.

Not boos.

An eruption.

A genuine, stunned, full-body shockwave of noise.

John Phillips: "LA FLAMA BLANCA IS HERE!"

Mark Bravo: "NOBODY thought we would ever see him in UTA again!"

The camera flies to the stage.

La Flama Blanca stands beneath the light, chest heaving, eyes locked straight down the ramp, his presence instantly magnetic. No smile. No pose for the hard camera. No easing into the moment. He looks like a man who already knows how huge this is and has no time to waste enjoying it.

John Phillips: "This is a 2025 Hall of Fame name! A legend in his own right! One of the most electrifying luchadores to ever step into UTA!"

Mark Bravo: "And this crowd is in absolute shock! They cannot believe what they're seeing!"

In the ring, Grimm releases Madman and slowly turns toward the stage, his face no longer emotionless. For the first time tonight, surprise has found him. Real surprise.

At the end of the ramp, El Fantasma react too. Their stillness breaks. They turn toward the stage, their eerie composure replaced by visible uncertainty as La Flama Blanca begins marching straight toward them.

John Phillips: "And look at El Fantasma! They were perfectly content standing in that fog until this moment!"

Mark Bravo: "Because this changes everything!"

La Flama doesn't slow down.

He hits the stage edge and picks up speed.

The crowd grows louder with every step, the reaction now turning from stunned disbelief into all-out bedlam as he closes the distance.

Oscuro 1 steps forward first.

La Flama blasts him with a forearm.

Oscuro 2 rushes in.

La Flama ducks, spins, and cracks him with a spinning heel kick that sends him staggering back into the fog.

John Phillips: "La Flama Blanca is going right after El Fantasma!"

Mark Bravo: "And listen to this building! He just turned the whole atmosphere on its head!"

Oscuro 1 comes back in and La Flama catches him with a dropkick that sends him tumbling off the side of the ramp. Oscuro 2 tries to regroup, but La Flama flies in with a jumping forearm and then a running clothesline that knocks him backward all the way into the curtain of fog, where he disappears from sight.

John Phillips: "He's clearing the path!"

Mark Bravo: "That's exactly what this is! He came here to even the odds for Madman!"

La Flama stands at the end of the ramp now, chest rising, pointing down the aisle toward the ring as if daring El Fantasma to come back for more. The crowd is deafening. Whatever hold of darkness and uncertainty El Fantasma had over the moment is broken. Smashed. Torn apart by one impossible arrival.

John Phillips: "What a moment! What a return! La Flama Blanca has just blown the roof off Victorious!"

Mark Bravo: "And the crazy part? I still don't think half this crowd believes it's real!"

Inside the ring, Madman Szalinski is on one knee now, looking toward the ramp with a mixture of exhaustion, disbelief, and something close to awe. Grimm looks from Madman... to La Flama... then back again, recalculating all over from scratch.

John Phillips: "Madman Szalinski needed something—anything—to stop this from becoming a complete nightmare. And instead he got one of the biggest surprises imaginable!"

Mark Bravo: "A surprise? Brother, this is an earthquake!"

La Flama remains at the end of the ramp, standing guard now, making sure El Fantasma stay gone. In the ring, Grimm steps back toward Madman, but the entire feel of the match has changed. The confidence is gone. The sense of control is gone. The dark ritual Grimm thought he was conducting has been interrupted by an impossible return and a living shot of adrenaline.

John Phillips: "The numbers are neutralized!"

Mark Bravo: "And now Silas Grimm has to finish this himself!"

Madman grabs the ropes and starts pulling himself back up, the crowd roaring every inch of the way. His eyes drift once more toward La Flama Blanca at the end of the ramp. La Flama pounds his chest once and points back toward the ring.

Fight.

Madman nods.

Grimm sees it too and grimaces, knowing the tide he had so carefully manipulated has just turned against him.

John Phillips: "La Flama Blanca has arrived to aid Madman Szalinski and fend off El Fantasma, and now this match may have just entered its final, wildest stretch."

Mark Bravo: "And after a moment like that? Madman better throw every last thing he's got left."

Madman gets to his feet.

Grimm steps forward.

And with the entire arena shaking around them, the match is reborn.

Madman Szalinski rises the rest of the way now, still hurt, still limping, still clutching at the neck Grimm has spent the entire match trying to ruin—but there is something back in him that was gone thirty seconds ago.

Energy.

Belief.

Madness.

John Phillips: "You can see it! You can actually see it!"

Mark Bravo: "La Flama Blanca just lit this man back up!"

Madman turns his head one last time toward the ramp. La Flama is still there, standing tall at the end of it, a sentinel in flesh and light where fog and doubt stood moments ago. Madman nods once.

Then he turns back to Silas Grimm.

And charges.

John Phillips: "Madman is coming alive!"

Grimm throws a palm strike to cut him off. Madman bats it away and fires a right hand. Then another. Then a third. Grimm gives ground for the first time not because of strategy, but because he has to. Madman storms him all the way into the ropes and whips him across the ring with everything he has left.

Grimm rebounds.

Madman crushes him with a Tecmo Elbow.

The crowd erupts.

Mark Bravo: "That one had some hate on it!"

Grimm stumbles back to his feet and Madman is already moving. He hits the ropes again, faster this time despite the bad leg, and lands a second Tecmo Elbow that spins Grimm around in place. Grimm tries to steady himself, but Madman grabs him from behind and rolls him backward into a schoolboy-style trap for just a second before popping back up into a standing dropkick that catches Grimm square in the jaw.

John Phillips: "Madman throwing everything at him now!"

Mark Bravo: "Because he knows this is the surge! This is the one you ride or die with!"

Grimm scrambles to the corner. Madman is on him instantly with elevated mounted punches, climbing the middle rope and hammering down as the crowd counts with every shot.

Crowd: "ONE! TWO! THREE! FOUR! FIVE! SIX! SEVEN! EIGHT! NINE! TEN!"

John Phillips: "The diez count from Madman Szalinski!"

Madman drops back to the mat and Grimm lurches out of the corner glassy-eyed. Madman hooks him around the waist, trying for something bigger, but Grimm widens his base and blocks it. Madman changes course immediately, snapping off a dragon screw leg whip of his own and sending Grimm down hard to the canvas.

Mark Bravo: "Nice counter! Nice counter!"

John Phillips: "Madman now attacking the leg! Turning Grimm's own medicine right back around!"

Madman rises and the crowd is thunderous. He points at Grimm, then at his own eyes, then motions with both hands like he is dragging himself deeper into the fight with every ounce of stubbornness he's ever had. Grimm gets up on one knee and Madman snaps a spinning heel kick into the side of the head that sends him collapsing backward again.

John Phillips: "What a burst from Madman!"

Mark Bravo: "This ain't just a second wind. This is a whole damn storm."

Madman looks down at Grimm and then toward the top rope. The crowd senses it and rises again. Grimm is still moving, trying to push up, but Madman is already heading for the corner, climbing much faster this time than he did for the X-Buster earlier. Pain is still there, but now he is overriding it with pure adrenaline.

John Phillips: "Madman going up again!"

Mark Bravo: "He wants to finish this! He knows Grimm is rocked!"

Madman reaches the top and steadies himself. Grimm gets to his feet just in time to see it. Madman launches with a diving crossbody from the top rope and crashes into Grimm with full force, taking both men down. The impact bounces Grimm hard off the mat and Madman hooks the leg immediately.

Referee: "One! Two!"

Grimm kicks out.

John Phillips: "Still not enough!"

Mark Bravo: "But Madman is forcing Grimm to survive now instead of the other way around!"

Madman slaps the mat once in frustration, then pulls Grimm up again before the latter can regroup. He whips him to the ropes one more time and this time catches him with a running high knee to the body that folds Grimm over. Madman immediately hooks both arms.

The crowd buzzes because they know this could be something major.

John Phillips: "Wait a second..."

Madman tries to lift for The Border Crosser style double underhook sit-out facebuster variation—his own rougher spin on an old trick from his orbit—but Grimm fights out of the elevation and drops to one knee instead, ripping one arm free. Madman pivots on instinct and catches him with a short DDT instead, spiking him enough to send Grimm rolling toward the ropes in a daze.

Mark Bravo: "Not what he wanted, but it still landed!"

Grimm drapes himself across the middle rope, trying to breathe, trying to think, trying to survive the sheer chaos coming at him now. Madman rises and looks around. The crowd is fully with him. La Flama Blanca is still at the ramp, pounding the guardrail once and shouting toward the ring. Madman points to him, then to the people, then back to Grimm.

John Phillips: "Madman is feeding off all of it now!"

Mark Bravo: "That's what happens when a building believes in you and your body suddenly decides not to quit."

Madman grabs Grimm by the head and starts dragging him toward center ring, maybe looking for the Deathtrap again, maybe something else, but Grimm has just enough presence to thumb him in the eye. The crowd boos hard. Madman recoils. Grimm takes one staggered step backward and then another, trying to buy himself a second.

John Phillips: "A desperate escape by Grimm!"

Grimm charges in immediately after the eye rake, trying to capitalize, but Madman drops low and back body drops him again. Grimm lands ugly and this time rolls all the way to the apron, hanging there with one arm over the top rope.

Mark Bravo: "Grimm is hanging on by grit at this point!"

Madman sees his chance and heads toward the ropes, maybe thinking about knocking him off the apron for good. He

reaches through the strands and grabs at Grimm—

but Grimm snaps back to life and catches him with a hot shot across the top rope, dropping Madman throat-first and sending him reeling backward.

John Phillips: "Grimm bought himself a little room there!"

Grimm slings back into the ring, but he is nowhere near full control anymore. He runs at Madman with a lariat—Madman ducks. Grimm spins around. Madman catches him with a superkick-level shot from The Estupendo Kick family, a high snapping kick right under the jaw that sends Grimm collapsing backward into the corner.

Mark Bravo: "OH! What a kick!"

John Phillips: "That may have knocked Grimm senseless!"

Madman doesn't even think now. He just acts. He sprints forward, jumps to the second rope, then springs outward, twisting through the air and crashing into Grimm with a springboard somersault body attack that wipes both men out in the corner.

The crowd is in a frenzy.

John Phillips: "Madman is emptying the tank!"

Mark Bravo: "And Grimm is in survival mode whether he likes it or not!"

Madman drags himself upright first and hauls Grimm out of the corner by the wrist. Grimm can barely stand. Madman looks out at the crowd, then down at Grimm, then up to the top rope one more time. The people know what that means and they are roaring before he ever makes the climb.

John Phillips: "Could he be thinking Ay Dios Mio?!"

Mark Bravo: "No way... not after everything he's already done..."

Madman stuffs Grimm into place near center, then turns and starts climbing.

Not quickly this time.

But relentlessly.

One rung.

Then the next.

Grimm stirs below him.

La Flama is pounding the barricade now, urging him on.

The crowd is on its feet, the whole arena trying to carry Madman through this final ascent.

John Phillips: "This could be the moment! This could be the payoff to everything!"

Madman reaches the top rope and rises, every inch of him trembling with effort, pain, adrenaline, and history.

Below him, Silas Grimm is beginning to stand.

And the match is once again balanced on the edge of disaster.

Madman Szalinski stands on the top rope, body trembling, chest heaving, every muscle in his frame screaming from the punishment he has taken. Below him, Silas Grimm is only just beginning to rise, instinct dragging him upward even as the damage tries to keep him down.

John Phillips: "Madman is up top!"

Mark Bravo: "He has one shot here! One perfect shot!"

Grimm gets to his feet and turns just enough to face the corner.

Madman launches.

He throws himself into the air with everything he has left, elbow out.

And he hits it.

John Phillips: "HE GOT IT! ELBOW DROP FROM THE TOP ROPE!"

Mark Bravo: "HE HIT IT! HE HIT IT CLEAN!"

The impact is enormous.

Madman crashes down across Silas Grimm's chest, connecting squarely in his chest. Grimm's body jolts against the canvas as the crowd absolutely explodes, a full building-wide detonation of sound and disbelief and joy.

Madman rolls through the landing in pain himself, clutching at his ribs for half a second—but instinct takes over. He throws himself back across Grimm, hooks the leg with everything he has left, and the referee dives into position.

Referee: "ONE!"

John Phillips: "This could be it!"

Referee: "TWO!"

Mark Bravo: "COME ON!"

Referee: "THREE!"

DING DING DING!

John Phillips: "HE DID IT! MADMAN SZALINSKI WINS!"

Mark Bravo: "HE CAME BACK AND HE WON! MADMAN DID IT!"

The CHI Health Center comes unglued.

People leap to their feet. Hands shoot into the air. Fans scream, cry, clap, and lose themselves in the enormity of what they just saw. Madman remains draped across Grimm for a moment, almost too exhausted to process it himself. The referee tries to lift his arm and Madman can barely move.

John Phillips: "What a moment! What a comeback! What a return!"

Mark Bravo: "They told him he was done! They told him it was over! And now he just pinned Silas Grimm in the middle of the ring at Victorious!"

The referee finally gets Madman to sit up, then raises his hand. Madman's face is a mixture of pain, shock, and overwhelming emotion. He looks out into the crowd like a man waking up inside a dream he was told he could never have again.

Ring Announcer: "Here is your winner... MADMAN SZALINSKI!"

The ovation somehow gets even louder.

On the outside, officials and ringside staff help roll Silas Grimm out under the bottom rope. He is barely conscious, limp from the landing and the pinfall, and as they guide him away from the ring there is no ritual calm left in him now. No eerie control. No ceremony. Just defeat.

John Phillips: "Silas Grimm wanted to end Madman for good. Instead, Madman Szalinski just gave him a loss he may

never forget."

Mark Bravo: "And now get Grimm out of there. This moment belongs to somebody else."

With Grimm removed from the ring area, the camera swings to the end of the ramp where La Flama Blanca is already moving. He breaks into a run, the crowd roaring all over again as the impossible return becomes part of something even bigger.

John Phillips: "And here comes La Flama Blanca!"

Mark Bravo: "This is incredible!"

La Flama slides into the ring and pops to his feet. Madman sees him, still kneeling, still trying to breathe, still trying to process the victory. For one heartbeat they just look at each other.

Then La Flama grabs him and pulls him into a huge embrace.

The building erupts again.

John Phillips: "Look at this!"

Mark Bravo: "That right there... that is what this business is about."

Madman hugs him back hard, almost collapsing into him from exhaustion and emotion all at once. La Flama pounds him on the back, shouting something in Spanish that gets lost beneath the noise, but the message is clear enough anyway.

You did it.

You're back.

You won.

John Phillips: "Madman Szalinski and La Flama Blanca in the center of a UTA ring together! Nobody thought we'd see one of these things tonight, let alone both!"

Mark Bravo: "And now they're standing here together after Madman just pulled off one of the most emotional wins we've seen in years!"

The referee joins them and raises Madman's hand again. Then La Flama takes Madman's other arm and lifts it high. Madman throws his head back and screams to the rafters, finally letting all of it out—the frustration, the pain, the comeback, the fear, the disbelief, the joy.

The crowd is thunderous.

La Flama steps back just enough to clap for him, then points directly at Madman as if to tell the entire world exactly who this moment belongs to.

John Phillips: "This is massive. Absolutely massive."

Mark Bravo: "A Hall of Famer came back from the brink, beat the man who tried to bury him, and celebrated the victory with a return nobody thought the UTA would ever see again. That's not just a win. That's history."

Madman turns to La Flama and the two embrace once more, this time with less shock and more joy. The camera circles them, catching the crowd on its feet, signs shaking, people screaming, some visibly crying as they watch the scene unfold.

Madman points to La Flama.

Then to himself.

Then out to the fans.

The response is deafening.

John Phillips: "Victorious promised moments we would never forget."

Mark Bravo: "Well congratulations. There's one for life."

The final image is a perfect one.

Madman Szalinski and La Flama Blanca standing side by side in the center of the ring, arms raised, bathed in the roar of a crowd that knows it has just witnessed something truly special.

Really Totally Real, Really Totally Active

Segment

The scene cuts backstage.

Melissa Cartwright stands in front of a black-and-gold VICTORIOUS backdrop, microphone in hand, still looking like she is trying to process the last several minutes of her own job. The roar from the arena can still be heard faintly in the distance, the sound of a crowd that just witnessed Madman Szalinski win a match in 2026... and La Flama Blanca return to the United Toughness Alliance.

Melissa Cartwright: "Melissa Cartwright here backstage, and I honestly don't know if anyone in this building could have imagined what we just witnessed."

Melissa Cartwright: "A Madman Szalinski match in 2026 would have been shocking enough on its own..."

Melissa Cartwright: "But the return of La Flama Blanca?"

Melissa Cartwright: "I mean... I still can't quite believe we just saw that."

A voice cuts in from off camera.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Well, that's because you people are all very easily distracted."

Eric Dane Jr. steps into frame, the Hardcore Championship slung proudly over his shoulder, jaw set in the kind of smug grin that only gets worse the more attention it receives. He is still sweaty from the ladder match, still a little roughed up, but you would never know it from the way he carries himself. In his mind, he is not entering an interview. He is entering his own victory parade.

Melissa Cartwright: "Eric."

Eric Dane Jr.: "That's right. Eric."

He taps the faceplate of the title with two fingers.

Eric Dane Jr.: "The totally real UTA Hardcore Champion."

Melissa Cartwright: "Well, regardless of your... phrasing... you did defeat Bobby Dean in a ladder match tonight and leave with the championship."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Exactly."

Eric Dane Jr.: "So while everybody else is out there losing their minds over nostalgia and surprise returns and whatever little emotional support reunion just happened in the ring..."

He shrugs with theatrical indifference.

Eric Dane Jr.: "I'm the one making history."

Melissa Cartwright: "Making history?"

Eric Dane Jr.: "Please, Melissa. Keep up."

Eric Dane Jr.: "I walked into Victorious with an opportunity. I walked out of Victorious with gold. Again."

He adjusts the title on his shoulder and flashes it toward the camera.

Eric Dane Jr.: "And just look at it. Gorgeous."

Melissa Cartwright: "I think some would say Bobby Dean made that match a lot harder than you expected."

Eric Dane Jr.: "And some people are idiots."

Eric Dane Jr.: "I said I was going to win. I won. That's called consistency. It's what stars do."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Now sure, Bobby Dean flopped around for a while. Scooters happened. Bowling equipment happened. Feelings happened. But at the end of the day..."

He pats the title again.

Eric Dane Jr.: "This came home with Daddy Dane."

Melissa Cartwright: "I'm not sure that phrase is ever going to sound normal."

Eric Dane Jr.: "It doesn't have to sound normal. It has to sound right."

Eric turns slightly toward the camera now, growing more animated by the second as his own voice intoxicates him.

Eric Dane Jr.: "See, that's the problem with this company. Y'all are always obsessed with the wrong thing."

Eric Dane Jr.: "One old guy comes back. Another old guy shows up. Everybody cries."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Meanwhile, a young icon is standing right here with championship gold on his shoulder, looking better than anyone has any right to look after a ladder match, and somehow I'm supposed to act like that isn't the headline?"

Melissa Cartwright: "Well, to be fair, Madman Szalinski returning to the ring and beating Silas Grimm is a pretty major story."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Sure. For old people."

Eric Dane Jr.: "This?"

He lifts the title off his shoulder and holds it in both hands, admiring his reflection in the faceplate.

Eric Dane Jr.: "This is the future."

Before Melissa can respond, another voice cuts into the scene.

Scott Stevens: "No. The future is me getting that thing out of your hands right now."

Scott Stevens steps into frame looking every bit like a man whose blood pressure has been under attack all night. He's not just annoyed. He's exhausted in the way only Eric Dane Jr. seems capable of making people.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Oh, brother."

Eric Dane Jr.: "What do you want, Scott?"

Scott Stevens: "Playtime is over."

He points directly at the belt.

Scott Stevens: "You can hand me the title now."

Scott Stevens: "You know damn well it isn't a real title by any means, and it hasn't been active in years."

Melissa quietly steps a little to the side, sensing this is no longer an interview so much as a legal proceeding with poor emotional regulation.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Mmm."

Eric tilts his head and raises one eyebrow, a huge grin already spreading across his face.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Now while that may have been true..."

He raises one finger.

Eric Dane Jr.: "The moment you set the match..."

He taps Scott lightly in the chest with that same finger.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Well, buddy..."

Eric Dane Jr.: "You made it both real and active."

Scott Stevens stares at him.

Then blinks.

Then stares some more.

You can actually see the moment the argument lands.

It is not a happy moment.

Melissa Cartwright: "Oh..."

John Phillips: "..."

Mark Bravo: "..."

Scott's expression goes completely still, which is somehow worse than if he had started yelling immediately.

Eric Dane Jr.: "What?"

Eric Dane Jr.: "Cat got your tongue?"

Eric is absolutely glowing now, feeding on every second of this. The title goes back over his shoulder and he rocks back on his heels like a man admiring his own courtroom victory.

Scott Stevens: "Fine."

Scott Stevens: "It doesn't matter."

Scott Stevens: "You win, Eric. You cashed in your guaranteed title shot, and we're even."

Eric immediately throws a finger up.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Ah-ah-ah."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Don't think so, Scott."

Scott closes his eyes for one second, the way a man does when he is trying very hard not to commit a felony on camera.

Scott Stevens: "Excuse me?"

Eric Dane Jr.: "You can't sanction my title shot to a defunct title..."

He spreads his hands as if teaching a small child.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Which, at the time, it was."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Therefore..."

He pauses for dramatic effect and smiles even wider.

Eric Dane Jr.: "By the transitive property of wrestling..."

Eric Dane Jr.: "My contract still stands."

Melissa physically lowers her microphone and looks from Eric to Scott and back again like she cannot believe she is hearing any of this in a serious professional setting.

Scott Stevens, meanwhile, looks like his head may actually explode.

Because once again...

Eric is right.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Yeah."

Eric Dane Jr.: "That's what I thought."

Eric's grin is enormous now. Weaponized. Evil. Triumphant. He slowly pulls the Hardcore Championship off his shoulder again and hugs it to his chest like a prized possession.

Eric Dane Jr.: "So let me see if I understand this correctly."

Eric Dane Jr.: "I am the totally real Hardcore Champion..."

Eric Dane Jr.: "Holding a totally active title..."

Eric Dane Jr.: "And I still have a guaranteed title shot in my back pocket?"

He looks directly into the camera.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Wow."

Eric Dane Jr.: "That's what we call having leverage, baby."

Melissa Cartwright: "Scott?"

Scott says nothing at first.

He just stares at Eric Dane Jr. with the hollow, defeated rage of a man who knows he has somehow walked into a trap he absolutely should have seen coming.

Mark Bravo: "I have never seen a man look so ready to bite through drywall."

John Phillips: "Eric Dane Jr. may have just talked his way into leaving Victorious with even more than championship gold."

Scott finally exhales through his nose.

Scott Stevens: "I hate you."

Eric Dane Jr.: "No you don't."

Eric Dane Jr.: "You hate that I'm smarter than you."

Eric gives Melissa a wink, adjusts the title on his shoulder one more time, and takes a step backward out of frame, still grinning from ear to ear.

Eric Dane Jr.: "Long live the Hardcore Champion."

Eric Dane Jr.: "And good luck sleeping tonight, Scott."

He exits laughing to himself.

Melissa looks toward Scott, who is still standing there in total disbelief, steam nearly coming out of his ears.

Melissa Cartwright: "So... just to clarify..."

Scott Stevens: "Don't."

Melissa wisely decides not to.

The segment fades out on Scott Stevens standing there with egg on his face, and Eric Dane Jr. somewhere off-camera walking away as both the totally real Hardcore Champion... and a man still holding a guaranteed title shot.

The Killer Bee is Coming

Segment

The screen cuts to black.

No commentary.

No arena sound.

Just the soft buzz of fluorescent lights.

Then—

A whistle.

Sharp.

Cheer practice sharp.

Cut in.

A tight shot of white athletic tape being pulled around a wrist.

Then over that—

An MMA glove sliding snug into place.

Cut.

A close-up of a blonde ponytail snapping tight as a green bow is cinched into it.

Then the other one.

Cut.

A mirror under bright locker room lights.

Not the full face.

Just the lower half.

A glossy smile.

A swipe of lip gloss.

A little smirk.

Cut.

Pom-poms hit a hardwood floor.

Green.

Black.

White.

They are left there.

Not discarded.

Outgrown.

Cut.

A set of feet sprints across a gym mat.

Roundoff.

Back handspring.

Back tuck.

Perfect landing.

No hesitation.

Cut.

Ring ropes.

A hand plants.

A blur shoots upward.

Springboard.

Twist.

Landing on both feet.

The camera can barely keep up.

Cut.

Now we're in an empty gymnasium.

Banners hang high overhead.

The camera pans slowly across the rafters until it settles on a silhouette standing alone at center court.

Hands on hips.

Weight on one leg.

Head tilted just enough to radiate confidence.

Then she moves.

Cartwheel.

Handspring.

A fast spin into a shadowbox combination.

A kick through the air.

Then a snap of motion so quick it almost doesn't register before she's balancing on the second rope in a ring set up nearby.

She hops down.

Smiles at nobody.

Like she knows exactly who's watching anyway.

Cut to black.

Then a bright, bubbly voice.

Voice: "Okayyy... sooo you already got, like, the sneak peek."

A beat.

Voice: "And if you still don't know who I am?"

Voice: "That is honestly kind of on you."

Cut.

A close-up of high-top sneakers laced in green, black, and white bouncing lightly in place.

Cut.

A shot of the HORNETS logo across the front of a cheer-inspired top, but this time the camera doesn't linger for mystery.

It glides upward.

Long blonde twin ponytails.

Perfect makeup.

A bright smile with just a little too much confidence behind it.

Cut.

Now she's seated on the ring apron, one leg swinging, looking straight into the camera like it's a best friend and a rival at the same time.

Brittany Reid: "I know. I know."

Brittany Reid: "You're probably, like, freaking out a little?"

Brittany Reid: "Because UTA has a lot of super serious girls who stomp around and glare and act like smiling is illegal..."

She shrugs.

Brittany Reid: "And then there's me."

She hops up to her feet in one smooth motion and springs to the middle rope, balancing there effortlessly.

Brittany Reid: "I'm Brittany Reid."

Brittany Reid: "The Killer Bee."

Brittany Reid: "And trust me?"

Brittany Reid: "I am not coming here to just look cute and wave at everybody."

Her smile sharpens.

Not mean.

Competitive.

Dangerous in the way only a girl who knows exactly what she can do can be.

Cut.

Training montage now.

Fast.

Precise.

A springboard hurricanrana on a training dummy.

A superkick blasting a pad backward.

A sliced-bread style flip into a reverse DDT on a crash mat.

A standing moonsault landed perfectly.

A rope run.

A top-rope corkscrew.

A double rotation moonsault in silhouette onto a stack of pads.

Voice: "I fly higher."

Voice: "I move faster."

Voice: "And when girls think they've finally got me figured out?"

Voice: "That's usually when they wake up staring at the lights."

Cut.

Brittany is now in front of a row of metal lockers, stretching one leg up onto a bench.

She looks over at the camera with exaggerated innocence.

Brittany Reid: "And like... I know what some people are gonna say."

Brittany Reid: "'She's tiny.'"

Brittany Reid: "'She's too happy.'"

Brittany Reid: "'She should stop playing to the crowd and take this more seriously.'"

She lets out a little laugh.

Brittany Reid: "Um..."

Brittany Reid: "No."

Brittany Reid: "Because I do take this seriously."

Brittany Reid: "I just happen to look adorable doing it."

Cut.

Now she's on the top turnbuckle in an empty arena.

Spotlight on her.

Darkness everywhere else.

She crouches like she's about to launch into orbit, then pauses and looks straight down the lens.

Brittany Reid: "UTA..."

Brittany Reid: "You better be ready."

Brittany Reid: "Because when I get there?"

She winks.

Brittany Reid: "I'm not just bringing spirit."

Brittany Reid: "I'm bringing a whole highlight reel."

She leaps.

The screen flashes white before impact.

Cut.

Now one last close-up.

Brittany standing dead center under a bright spotlight, hands on hips, twin ponytails bouncing slightly, gloves on, HORNETS across her chest, all confidence and energy and motion packed into one tiny storm.

Brittany Reid: "So keep cheering."

Brittany Reid: "Keep doubting."

Brittany Reid: "Keep blinking."

Brittany Reid: "And I'll keep making people miss me right before they feel the sting."

She blows a kiss to the camera.

The screen slams to a bright graphic.

COMING SOON

BRITTANY REID

"THE KILLER BEE"

Fighting Championship

Segment

The broadcast transitions into another recap package.

The tone changes again, this time leaning into urgency and consequence. Sharp cuts. Hard hits. Championship graphics. The sound of a tournament coming apart and reforming in real time.

John Phillips: "Still to come tonight, the UTA Fighting Championship will be decided."

Mark Bravo: "And the road to get there has been anything but simple. What started as a tournament path turned into injuries, opportunity, politics, and now one huge title fight at Victorious."

The screen fills with tournament bracket visuals and action highlights from the last two shows.

We see the Fighting Championship tournament unfolding in violent bursts. Strikes. Submissions. Narrow escapes. Contenders clawing forward one round at a time. The package emphasizes that this was never about surviving one match. It was about surviving a gauntlet.

John Phillips: "Over the last two shows, the Fighting Championship picture has taken shape through tournament action

that tested every competitor physically and mentally."

Mark Bravo: "And that's the thing about a tournament. Sometimes the best fighter doesn't just have to be the toughest. They've got to be the luckiest too."

We see Emily Hightower's path through the bracket, clips of her digging deep and fighting with that familiar mix of grit and family pressure, the package painting her as a woman trying not just to win, but to prove she belongs at the center of a division that never gives her room to breathe.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower fought her way through the field with the full weight of expectation on her shoulders. Every round. Every collision. Every step closer to the title."

Mark Bravo: "And with the Hightower name, there is always pressure. Winning is one thing. Winning while the whole world waits for you to crack is something else entirely."

The package now shifts to Valentina Blaze.

Valentina's tournament moments flash across the screen next: precision offense, survival, and the crowd clearly rallying behind the idea that she might be the one destined to meet Emily when the dust settled.

John Phillips: "Valentina Blaze looked poised to capitalize on that path. She had momentum. She had legitimacy. And for many, she looked like the rightful next challenger in line."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and a lot of people thought that was where this was headed. Emily and Valentina. Clean. Simple. Tournament final feeling. Sport takes over. Best woman wins."

Then the recap darkens.

The highlight package slows.

We see Valentina down.

Medical attention.

Concern.

The realization settling in that the tournament path had just been broken open by injury.

John Phillips: "But that is not how it went."

Mark Bravo: "Nope. Because just when it looked like Valentina Blaze had the inside track... the injury changed everything."

The package lingers on the aftermath. Trainers checking on Valentina. Officials conferring. The tournament no longer feeling stable, but fragile.

John Phillips: "Valentina Blaze was injured before she could finish the journey to this championship match, and in one instant, the entire Fighting Championship picture changed."

Mark Bravo: "And whenever there's a vacuum in this company, somebody's gonna try to fill it fast."

Now the package transitions to Amy Harrison.

Cold. Composed. Opportunistic.

She is shown speaking backstage, surrounded by power, carrying herself like a woman who knows how to turn chaos into leverage better than almost anyone in UTA.

John Phillips: "That opening did not stay open for long. Amy Harrison saw an opportunity and moved quickly."

Mark Bravo: "Of course she did. Amy Harrison never wastes a crack in the wall. She turns it into a door."

The graphic shows Valkyrie Knoxx stepping into frame.

Training footage. Walk-ins. Hard stares. Controlled intensity. The package makes it clear that Valkyrie was not part of the original story everyone expected... but she was more than willing to become part of the new one.

John Phillips: "With Valentina Blaze unable to compete, Amy Harrison pushed Valkyrie Knoxx into the vacant place."

Mark Bravo: "And that's where this gets dangerous. Because Valkyrie doesn't care that the road changed. She doesn't care that she wasn't the original name penciled in. All she cares about is the chance in front of her."

We see Valkyrie striking pads. Walking hallways. Standing beside Amy. Looking into the camera with the kind of expression that says she doesn't see this as a substitute spot. She sees it as destiny arriving late but still arriving.

John Phillips: "For Valkyrie Knoxx, this is not some consolation role in another woman's bracket. This is the biggest opportunity of her career."

Mark Bravo: "And maybe the scariest part for Emily Hightower is that Valkyrie walks into this with nothing to lose. No pressure from the tournament path. No burden of expectation. Just a shot at the title."

The recap now cuts between Emily and Valkyrie.

Emily training. Emily staring at the title. Emily shouldering the pressure.

Valkyrie bouncing in place, taped fists, narrowed eyes, all edge and hunger.

The title graphic flashes over both women.

UTA FIGHTING CHAMPIONSHIP

EMILY HIGHTOWER vs. VALKYRIE KNOXX

John Phillips: "And so the Fighting Championship tournament gave way to something more complicated."

Mark Bravo: "That's a nice way to say messy."

John Phillips: "Maybe so. But whatever road led us here, the destination remains the same. Tonight, Emily Hightower and Valkyrie Knoxx fight for the championship."

Mark Bravo: "Emily trying to validate the path she fought through. Valkyrie trying to make everyone forget she wasn't the original name in the spot. And all of it happening under Fighting Championship Rules."

The package gives one last look at Valentina Blaze being helped away, then crossfades directly into Emily and Valkyrie again, reinforcing the reality of what changed and who now stands to benefit from it.

John Phillips: "Valentina Blaze's injury altered the bracket. Amy Harrison's influence altered the matchup. And now two very different women will try to leave Victorious as Fighting Champion."

Mark Bravo: "One path was planned. The other was forced open. But tonight? None of that matters once the bell rings."

The final visual is split down the middle.

On one side, Emily Hightower, title in hand, face intense, burdened, and focused.

On the other, Valkyrie Knoxx, eyes sharp, fists taped, looking like she plans to tear the whole thing down around her if that's what it takes.

EMILY HIGHTOWER vs. VALKYRIE KNOXX

UTA FIGHTING CHAMPIONSHIP

NEXT

The recap package fades out.

Emily Hightower vs. Valkyrie Knox

Match

The recap package fades out.

The arena stays dark for a breath longer than usual.

No immediate music.

No rush.

Just the hum of anticipation inside the CHI Health Center as the crowd waits to see which version of Valkyrie Knox is arriving tonight.

John Phillips: "We are moments away from the UTA Fighting Championship match."

Mark Bravo: "And after everything that happened to get us here, this one already feels tense before either woman even walks through the curtain."

Then the lights plunge into deep purple.

A low roll of thunder shakes through the speakers.

Then the war-horn blares.

The crowd reacts immediately with a wave of boos as smoke pours across the stage and the first cold, ominous notes of "You Should See Me in a Crown" hit the building.

John Phillips: "And here comes Valkyrie Knox."

Mark Bravo: "No Amy. No Trey. No Clovis. No Empire."

John Phillips: "That is important."

The camera cuts to the stage.

Valkyrie Knox emerges from the smoke alone.

No entourage.

No backup.

No shadows flanking her.

Just Valkyrie.

The Iron Valkyrie steps out into the purple haze like a warrior walking into judgment. Her expression is unreadable, her posture rigid and proud, her eyes fixed straight down the ramp toward the ring. There is no showmanship in her body language beyond the aura she naturally creates. She does not need to play to the crowd. She does not need to beg for attention. She just takes it.

John Phillips: "Former Women's Champion. One of the most physically imposing women in this company. And tonight she walks into the biggest singles opportunity she has had in a very long time."

Mark Bravo: "And I kinda like this look for her. No Empire around her. No Amy Harrison whispering in her ear. No clutter. Just the big scary Icelandic problem all by herself."

Valkyrie stops at the top of the stage and slowly raises the steel-spiked gauntlet toward the rafters.

Thunder cracks again.

The purple light flashes across the metal as the smoke curls around her boots.

John Phillips: "There is something very different about seeing her come out alone."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. It makes this feel less political and more violent."

She lowers the gauntlet and begins the walk to the ring.

Her pace is slow, deliberate, and totally without hesitation. Every step looks heavy. Intentional. Measured. She doesn't acknowledge a single fan. Doesn't react to a single insult. Doesn't even glance left or right. Her entire focus is on what waits ahead.

John Phillips: "Valkyrie Knox was not the original path to this title match. But thanks to injury, opportunity, and Amy Harrison forcing the issue, she now finds herself on this stage with a chance to become Fighting Champion."

Mark Bravo: "And let's be honest here: if you're Emily Hightower, this is not some substitute opponent. This is a former champion, a power fighter, and one of the hardest women in UTA to physically move once she gets rolling."

The camera catches Valkyrie from the side as she keeps marching, black gear, dark makeup, hard edges, and brutal intent wrapped together into one cold silhouette under the arena lights.

John Phillips: "A former strongwoman competitor. Muay Thai influence. Pure slam-and-break-you mentality once the bell rings."

Mark Bravo: "And under Fighting Championship rules? That could be a nightmare. Because you don't need theatrics in that environment. You need damage. She specializes in damage."

Valkyrie reaches ringside and stops at the foot of the steps.

For a moment she just looks at the ring.

Then up toward where the title will soon be contested.

Then back into the ropes.

There is no visible emotion on her face. But there is purpose. Heavy, unmistakable purpose.

John Phillips: "You can question how she got the spot. You can question the politics behind it. But you cannot question whether Valkyrie Knox is dangerous enough to capitalize on it."

Mark Bravo: "Not for a second."

She climbs the steps and steps onto the apron.

The hard camera catches the shot as she turns her head slightly toward the crowd, not to acknowledge them, but almost to let them look one last time before the violence starts.

She steps through the ropes.

Inside the ring, Valkyrie walks directly to center, then slowly turns toward the stage side, shoulders squared, chest rising steadily. She raises the gauntlet once more, this time lower, tighter, more like a vow than a pose.

John Phillips: "Valkyrie Knox is here. Alone."

Mark Bravo: "And that may be the most dangerous version of her we've seen in a while."

She lowers her arm and backs into the corner, eyes never leaving the entrance.

No smile.

No fear.

No retreat.

Just a former champion standing in silence, ready to fight for another piece of gold.

John Phillips: "Valkyrie Knox has made her entrance. Now all that remains is the champion."

The camera lingers on Valkyrie in the corner as the crowd buzzes, waiting for Emily Hightower to arrive.

Valkyrie Knox waits in the ring, stone-still in her corner, eyes locked on the stage.

The purple haze of her entrance has barely cleared when the arena lights shift again, this time warming just enough to trade menace for grit.

Then the rough-edged opening of "The Outsiders" by Eric Church hits the speakers.

The crowd rises with a strong reaction as headlights appear at the top of the stage.

John Phillips: "And now here comes Emily Hightower."

Mark Bravo: "And this right here may be the most important entrance of her career."

The beat-up 1978 Chevy pickup growls onto the stage, rattling and shaking like it barely survived the trip to Omaha. Emily Hightower steps out first, slamming the door shut behind her and cracking her neck as she takes a quick pull from an energy drink like she is clocking in for a shift instead of walking into a championship fight.

But she is not alone.

Behind her come the rest of the Hightower Clan.

David Hightower steps out proud and loud, already carrying himself like this is a family victory waiting to happen. Buck Hightower follows with that same looming, dangerous presence, all quiet pressure and bad intentions. Dakota Hightower comes out last, pigtails and Southern charm masking the sharpness in her eyes as she immediately starts scanning the floor and ring area.

John Phillips: "And there they are. The Hightower Clan once again following Emily to the ring."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, except after the last two shows, you know Emily does not want this. Not like this."

Emily takes about three steps down the stage ramp before she stops dead.

The music keeps playing.

The crowd buzzes.

Emily doesn't turn slowly, dramatically, or politely.

She wheels around immediately and points straight at all three of them.

Emily Hightower: "No."

David's expression changes to confused annoyance. Buck halts in place. Dakota blinks once, reading the room faster than the others already are.

John Phillips: "Oh boy."

Mark Bravo: "Here we go."

Emily storms back up the stage a step, jaw set, eyes hot.

Emily Hightower: "I said no."

Emily Hightower: "Not tonight."

David spreads his hands like he can't believe this conversation is happening now.

David Hightower: "Baby girl, we're just walkin' you out."

Emily Hightower: "And then what?"

Emily Hightower: "You start yellin'? You slap the apron? You decide one of y'all knows better than me again?"

The crowd noise rises because everybody knows exactly what she is talking about.

John Phillips: "This has been building for weeks."

Mark Bravo: "And it looks like Emily's finally had enough of trying to say it nicely."

Emily points back toward the curtain now.

Emily Hightower: "Go to the back."

David Hightower: "Now hold on just a—"

Emily Hightower: "No, you hold on."

That lands.

David actually goes quiet for half a beat.

Emily Hightower: "This is my title match."

Emily Hightower: "My fight."

Emily Hightower: "And if I win this thing, I'm doin' it on my own."

Buck looks from Emily to David, then back again. Dakota lowers her eyes for a moment, almost like she knows her sister is right even before anybody says it out loud.

Mark Bravo: "She means every word of that."

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower is drawing the line tonight."

Emily steps closer to them, not backing down an inch.

Emily Hightower: "I love y'all."

Emily Hightower: "But you ain't comin' with me."

Emily Hightower: "Backstage. Now."

The music continues underneath the moment, but now it feels secondary to the confrontation happening in plain view of the whole arena.

David looks ready to argue again. Buck shifts his shoulders like he's bracing for a fight he doesn't want to have. Dakota finally reaches over and places a hand lightly on David's arm.

Dakota Hightower: "She's serious."

David looks at Dakota.

Then at Emily.

Then out at the ring where Valkyrie Knox is still waiting.

And for once, maybe because of the stage, maybe because of the title, maybe because Emily's voice gave him no room to pretend this was negotiable, he relents.

David Hightower: "Fine."

David Hightower: "You wanna do it your way, do it your way."

He points at her once.

David Hightower: "But you better win."

Emily Hightower: "I know exactly what I gotta do."

Buck gives Emily one long look, then a single nod.

Dakota gives her a softer one.

Then, finally, the Hightower Clan turns and heads back through the curtain.

The crowd pops big for it.

John Phillips: "And they're going!"

Mark Bravo: "There it is! Emily Hightower sent her whole family to the back!"

Emily stands alone at the top of the stage now.

Just her.

The truck.

The music.

The title fight ahead.

She looks toward the curtain one last time to make sure they're really gone.

Then she turns back to the ring.

And something about the whole picture changes immediately.

John Phillips: "For the first time in a long time, Emily Hightower is walking this road exactly the way she wanted."

Mark Bravo: "And you can feel how much that matters to her."

Emily takes a deep breath, drains the last of the energy drink, and tosses the can aside. She cracks her neck again, adjusts her gear, and starts down the ramp alone.

No backup.

No family behind her.

No noise except the roar of the crowd and the engine-rattle grit of her music.

Step by step, Emily makes her way to the ring with a look that is all business now. No frustration. No distraction. Just focus.

John Phillips: "This is a huge statement from Emily Hightower before the bell ever rings."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and now there are no excuses for anybody. Valkyrie came out alone. Emily sent her people away. This is exactly what a title fight should be."

The camera catches Valkyrie in the ring watching the entire walk, expression still cold, still unreadable, but now maybe just a little more alert. The politics are gone. The sideshows are gone. The women standing across from each other are all that remain.

Emily reaches ringside and pauses for a second, one hand on the apron, eyes going up to the ropes and then across to Valkyrie. There is no smile now. No glare toward family. No need to split her attention. Everything is in one place.

On the fight.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower asked for this moment to be hers."

Mark Bravo: "Well... now it is."

Emily climbs onto the apron and steps through the ropes. The crowd rises once more as she walks to her corner alone, bouncing lightly, rolling her shoulders, eyes never leaving Valkyrie Knoxx.

Across the ring, the former champion stands ready.

In this corner, the challenger who fought through the mess just to get here.

And for the first time all night, nothing stands between them but the match itself.

Emily Hightower stands in her corner now, finally and completely alone.

Across from her, Valkyrie Knoxx hasn't moved much at all. The former champion remains planted in place, eyes cold, shoulders squared, looking like a woman who never cared about the sideshow and never intended to let it distract her from the violence to come.

John Phillips: "There it is. No Empire at ringside. No Hightower Clan at ringside. No excuses. No interference. Just Emily Hightower and Valkyrie Knoxx."

Mark Bravo: "And under Fighting Championship Rules, that means the two women in this ring are about to have nowhere to hide."

The referee steps between them and gives one final check to both competitors. Emily paces once in place, jaw tight, rolling one shoulder and then the other, burning off the last of the emotion from that confrontation on the stage. Valkyrie simply cracks her neck once and slightly adjusts the steel-spiked gauntlet before handing it off at the ropes.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower has spent weeks trying to make this clear. She wanted her fights to be hers. She wanted her wins to be hers. Tonight, she made sure of it before the bell ever rang."

Mark Bravo: "And Valkyrie Knoxx? She didn't need anybody walking with her in the first place. That woman looks like she walked out here expecting to break something."

The camera cuts to a close-up of Emily.

Her breathing is measured now. The sweet all-American look is still there on the surface, but beneath it sits that familiar Hightower mean streak, the one that always shows itself when the bell is close. There is no smile. No nerves. Just the look of a woman ready to fight for every ugly inch of a title.

Then to Valkyrie.

The Iron Valkyrie's face is unreadable. Her presence is gothic and severe, but not theatrical. She looks less like someone preparing for a wrestling match and more like someone showing up to a debt collection she intends to complete.

John Phillips: "Two very different fighters. Emily Hightower is country grit and raw force with just enough athletic unpredictability to make her impossible to fully prepare for."

Mark Bravo: "And Valkyrie Knoxx is slam-you-through-the-floor strength mixed with just enough striking and control to make every second miserable."

The ring announcer steps into position as the crowd buzzes with that special kind of anticipation reserved for title matches that feel violent before they ever begin.

Ring Announcer: "The following contest is scheduled for one fall..."

Ring Announcer: "And it is for the UTA Fighting Championship!"

The crowd roars.

Ring Announcer: "This match will be contested under Fighting Championship Rules!"

John Phillips: "Those rules are so important. This is not just another title match. The environment changes the strategy. The pace changes. The danger changes."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because under Fighting Championship Rules, every exchange matters more. Every mistake matters more. You're not just trying to outwrestle somebody. You're trying to outlast them in a setting built for punishment."

The announcer turns toward Valkyrie's corner first.

Ring Announcer: "Introducing first... the challenger..."

Ring Announcer: "From Reykjavik, Iceland... weighing in at one hundred eighty-two pounds..."

Ring Announcer: "She is the Iron Valkyrie..."

Ring Announcer: "VALKYRIE KNOXX!"

Boos pour down as Valkyrie takes one step forward, chin tilted slightly upward, no need to do anything bigger than simply exist in the moment.

Mark Bravo: "That woman is built for title fights. I don't care how we got here, she looks right at home in this spot."

The announcer turns toward Emily.

Ring Announcer: "And her opponent..."

Ring Announcer: "From West Memphis, Arkansas... weighing in at one hundred seventy pounds..."

Ring Announcer: "She is..."

Ring Announcer: "EMILY HIGHTOWER!"

The crowd answers with a big reaction as Emily steps out of the corner and plants her feet near center ring. She doesn't raise her arms. Doesn't pose. Doesn't wave. She just stares across at Valkyrie like a woman ready to test whether she can drag the challenger into deep enough water to drown her there.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower has fought hard to get to this moment."

Mark Bravo: "And now that she's got it with no family at ringside, no Empire at ringside, and nothing hanging over her but the title itself... this may be the truest version of Emily Hightower we've seen."

The referee takes the Fighting Championship and holds it high above both women.

The camera gets the perfect shot.

Emily on one side.

Valkyrie on the other.

The gold hanging between them.

John Phillips: "The UTA Fighting Championship on the line."

Mark Bravo: "And I don't know what this is gonna be, but I know it's gonna hurt."

The referee hands the title away and gives both women their final instructions. Valkyrie never breaks eye contact. Emily leans in just enough to make it clear she isn't backing up an inch.

Referee: "You know the rules. Keep it clean. Keep it under control. Defend yourselves at all times."

He looks to Valkyrie.

Referee: "Ready?"

Valkyrie gives a single nod.

Then to Emily.

Referee: "Ready?"

Emily Hightower: "Ring the damn bell."

Mark Bravo: "Oh, I love that."

The referee steps back.

The crowd rises.

Emily edges forward first, shoulders low, hands up, looking ready to turn this into a bar fight the second she gets permission.

Valkyrie steps out too, slower, taller, heavier on the front foot, every movement deliberate, almost daring Emily to be reckless enough to engage her head-on.

John Phillips: "And here we go..."

The bell is one heartbeat away.

DING DING DING!

John Phillips: "And there's the bell!"

Mark Bravo: "Here we go! UTA Fighting Championship on the line, and remember the rules here!"

John Phillips: "Submission or referee stoppage only. No pinfalls. And each competitor gets only one rope break for the entire match."

Mark Bravo: "That last part changes everything. You can't just dive for the ropes every time you're in trouble. You get one escape hatch, and after that? You're trapped in there with whatever they've got on you."

Emily Hightower steps out of her corner first, all forward pressure and bad intent, hands high and feet planted like she wants to turn this title fight into a yard fight before Valkyrie Knox ever gets comfortable. Valkyrie comes out slower, taller, heavier on the front foot, composed and cold, every step deliberate as she dares Emily to run into something she'll regret.

John Phillips: "Emily wants pace. Valkyrie wants gravity. That's the contrast right away."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and under these rules, if Valkyrie gets a hold locked in, Emily has to think about more than just surviving it. She has to think about whether it's worth burning that rope break early."

They circle once.

Twice.

Emily flicks a quick low kick to the lead thigh.

Then another, harder.

Valkyrie absorbs both with almost no visible reaction and reaches in for a collar tie, but Emily slips aside and pops her with a forearm to the cheekbone before angling back out.

John Phillips: "Sharp opening from Emily Hightower!"

Mark Bravo: "In, out, touch and move. That's exactly what she has to do."

Emily steps in again with a jab to the chest and another low kick, trying to keep Valkyrie resetting. Valkyrie finally answers with a heavy right hand to the body that catches Emily as she exits and folds her just enough for Valkyrie to grab behind the neck and club her across the upper back.

John Phillips: "And that's the danger of standing too close to Valkyrie Knox!"

Mark Bravo: "One touch from her changes the whole conversation."

Emily stumbles a step, shakes it off, and comes right back with a hard forearm to the jaw. Then another. Then a body kick to the ribs. Valkyrie snarls and swings with a short-arm lariat, but Emily ducks underneath and clips the back of the knee with a chop kick that finally forces the bigger woman to shift her base.

John Phillips: "Good strategy from Emily! Attack the foundation!"

Mark Bravo: "If you can't move the whole woman, move what's holding her up."

Emily tries to follow immediately with a side headlock, cinching it in tight and trying to grind Valkyrie lower, but Valkyrie simply wraps both arms around the waist and walks her backward into the ropes. Emily hangs onto the headlock as long as she can before Valkyrie shoves her off hard across the ring.

Emily rebounds.

Valkyrie lowers the shoulder.

Emily leaps over it.

Hits the ropes again.

Comes back with a running shoulder tackle of her own.

Valkyrie does not move.

Mark Bravo: "That had to feel terrible."

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower threw everything she had into that shoulder block and Valkyrie Knox barely budged!"

Emily blinks once in disbelief, then covers it by snapping a forearm to Valkyrie's jaw. Valkyrie eats that too and answers with a vicious short-arm lariat that spins Emily inside out and sends her crashing to the mat.

John Phillips: "Short-arm lariat!"

Mark Bravo: "That was all bad news."

Valkyrie stands over Emily for a second, then drags her up by the wrist and shoulder and backs her into the corner. Emily tries to punch her way free with body shots, but Valkyrie crushes her with a corner body avalanche, then takes three heavy steps back and charges in with a running big boot that drops Emily to a seated position against the bottom buckle.

John Phillips: "Valkyrie starting to line up those collisions now!"

Mark Bravo: "And Emily does not want to live in this range. This is where Valkyrie can break you down in chunks."

Valkyrie reaches down and yanks Emily upright by the waist, looking for the deadlift German suplex. Emily hooks the leg and throws backward elbows, fighting the lift before it starts. One elbow catches Valkyrie behind the ear. Another glances off the cheek. Valkyrie's grip loosens just enough for Emily to drop her weight and back kick the shin before spinning free and cracking her with a forearm.

John Phillips: "Emily fighting for space!"

Emily hits the ropes and flies back in with a clothesline that staggers Valkyrie but doesn't drop her. She hits the ropes again and comes back with a second, this one louder, rougher, forcing Valkyrie into the ropes. A third attempt comes—and Valkyrie catches her around the waist in mid-motion.

Up.

Deadlift German suplex.

John Phillips: "Deadlift German!"

Mark Bravo: "That's a title-fight level throw right there!"

Emily folds high and lands ugly on the back of her shoulders and neck, rolling to her side and immediately grabbing at the base of the spine. Valkyrie rises behind her, breathing steady, expression unreadable, and stalks forward again.

John Phillips: "Emily felt all of that one."

Mark Bravo: "And now Valkyrie can really start thinking hold. That's where these rules get nasty."

Valkyrie drives a knee into Emily's side, then another, then traps one leg and begins turning her over into the standing inverted cloverleaf with neck crank—the Helheim Clutch.

John Phillips: "Helheim Clutch! Valkyrie's got it in!"

The crowd surges immediately as Valkyrie stands over Emily, wrenching the legs and lower back while twisting the upper body and neck in opposite directions. Emily screams out and claws at the mat, one hand reaching instinctively toward the ropes—but they are not close enough yet, and under these rules she has to think before she crawls.

Mark Bravo: "Here's the first huge moment of the match! Emily can burn that rope break if she gets there... but then it's gone."

John Phillips: "And if she uses it here, every submission attempt for the rest of this title fight becomes dramatically more dangerous."

Emily plants both palms and starts dragging her body forward inch by inch despite the torque. Valkyrie leans back harder, face still cold, trying to make the decision for her. Emily gets closer. Reaches. Fingers brush the bottom rope.

Referee: "Rope break! That's one!"

Valkyrie holds for a second longer than she should, then finally lets go and steps back with the faintest trace of a sneer.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower had to use it! Her one rope break is gone!"

Mark Bravo: "That is massive. Absolutely massive. Valkyrie now knows if she traps her again, there is no automatic save coming."

Emily uses the ropes to pull herself up, still favoring the leg and lower back now. Valkyrie advances immediately, smelling the damage, but Emily fires a rough forearm to the jaw to intercept her. Then another. Then a shoulder to the stomach that drives Valkyrie backward into the corner.

John Phillips: "Emily knows she has to answer right now!"

Emily unloads with body shots and clubbing forearms, turning the exchange ugly in a hurry. She backs up, charges in, and lands the running splash. Then she hits the ropes and comes back with Hit And Run, the big boot smashing Valkyrie high enough to send her stumbling out of the corner.

Mark Bravo: "There we go! That's Emily's world!"

Emily doesn't hesitate. She hooks Valkyrie and snaps her over with a hard suplex near center ring, then heads straight for the ropes. Springboard. Flipping rebound moonsault.

John Phillips: "Crash Landing!"

It connects flush.

Emily sits up instinctively looking for a cover before catching herself and instead immediately grabbing for a Fujiwara-style armbar transition, trying to turn momentum into a submission of her own. Valkyrie rolls her hips just in time and yanks the arm free before Emily can sit all the way back on it.

John Phillips: "Important reminder there! No pinfalls under Fighting Championship Rules. Emily had to transition, not cover!"

Mark Bravo: "And that little instinct almost cost her the armbar."

Both women scramble up. Valkyrie swings first with a short lariat. Emily ducks. Emily fires a forearm. Valkyrie answers with a knee to the body. Emily stumbles but comes back with a kick to the thigh and then another to the ribs. Valkyrie catches the third and yanks Emily inward, looking for the high-angle Michinoku Driver setup of the Valknut Driver.

John Phillips: "Valknut Driver attempt!"

Emily panics and twists free, landing behind Valkyrie. She shoves her to the ropes. Valkyrie rebounds. Emily catches her flush with Ode To My Father, the bull-hammer-style elbow crashing into the side of the jaw.

Mark Bravo: "OH! She cracked her!"

John Phillips: "Emily may have her hurt!"

Valkyrie stumbles on instinct. Emily hooks quickly around the head and arm, trying to spin through into Burn Out, the tornado double-arm DDT. Valkyrie muscles her way out of the full rotation and shoves Emily off to the ropes, but Emily uses that momentum against her. She rebounds back, flips through, and spikes Valkyrie with Burn Out anyway.

John Phillips: "Burn Out connects!"

Mark Bravo: "Now transition! Transition!"

Emily turns Valkyrie over and immediately reaches for the arm and head, trying to cinch in a Fujiwara-style armbar while controlling the shoulder. Valkyrie fights it with raw power, dragging both bodies toward the ropes. Emily realizes what's happening and tries to re-angle the hold before Valkyrie gets there.

John Phillips: "This is where the rope-break difference matters! Emily has no more. Valkyrie still has hers!"

Valkyrie stretches a hand out and grabs the bottom rope.

Referee: "Rope break! That's your one!"

Emily lets go quickly and backs up to her knees, breathing hard, while Valkyrie uses the ropes to pull herself up.

John Phillips: "And now both women have used their rope break."

Mark Bravo: "That changes the rest of this fight completely. From here on out, if one of them gets trapped in the ropes, too bad. No free exits left."

The crowd buzzes with the realization as both competitors rise again, each one marked now by what the rules have already forced them to spend. Emily shakes out her arm and shifts the leg Valkyrie attacked. Valkyrie rolls one shoulder, then wipes blood from the corner of her mouth where Ode To My Father found her.

John Phillips: "No pins. No more rope breaks. Submission or referee stoppage. We are heading into the deepest, ugliest stretch of this championship match."

Mark Bravo: "Exactly the way Fighting Championship Rules were designed."

Emily steps forward again.

Valkyrie steps forward too.

And now there is nothing left between them but pain and finish.

Emily Hightower and Valkyrie Knoxx step back into range with the entire shape of the match changed now.

No pinfalls.

No rope breaks left for either woman.

Only submission.

Only stoppage.

Only damage.

John Phillips: "This is where Fighting Championship Rules become truly merciless."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because now every hold can be the one. No bailout. No reset. No lucky crawl to the ropes. If you get trapped, you better know how to fight your way out."

Valkyrie steps in first this time, no longer content to let Emily dictate the first touch. She fires a hard low kick to the thigh, then another, then reaches for the collar tie. Emily slaps the hand away and answers with a forearm to the jaw. Valkyrie barely blinks and snaps one back of her own, heavier, nastier, enough to turn Emily's head and send sweat flying into the lights.

John Phillips: "Now they're trading with bad intentions."

Emily throws another forearm.

Valkyrie answers with a body shot.

Emily with a kick to the ribs.

Valkyrie with a knee to the stomach.

The exchange gets tighter and uglier with each shot until Valkyrie suddenly catches Emily around the back of the neck with both hands and drives her backward into the corner.

Mark Bravo: "Here comes the pressure again."

Valkyrie unloads with short, brutal strikes in close. Shoulder to the midsection. Clubbing forearm to the upper back. Another shoulder. Emily tries to punch her way free, but Valkyrie's size and leverage keep her pinned there until the challenger finally takes three steps back and crushes her with another corner body avalanche.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower getting mauled in the corner!"

Emily lurches forward out of the buckles. Valkyrie grabs her around the waist again, this time lifting clean. Emily starts throwing elbows backward in a panic, but Valkyrie powers through and launches her with another deadlift German suplex, this one even nastier than the first because Emily lands high and folds across the back of her neck and shoulders.

Mark Bravo: "Good Lord!"

John Phillips: "Another deadlift German! Valkyrie Knoxx is trying to fold Emily Hightower in half!"

Emily rolls instinctively toward the ropes, but there is no comfort there now. She grabs the bottom strand and uses it

only to drag herself to one knee, face twisted in pain, one arm hanging for a second longer than she wants it to.

John Phillips: "And remember, those ropes do not save her anymore."

Mark Bravo: "Nope. They're just decoration now."

Valkyrie sees the opening in the posture and starts stalking in behind Emily. The challenger steps over the bad leg, reaches down, and begins threading the hold again—the standing inverted cloverleaf, neck crank included, the Helheim Clutch.

John Phillips: "Helheim Clutch again! She's going back to it!"

Emily senses it just before Valkyrie can lock the full shape. She drops her weight flat to the canvas and kicks violently, one boot catching Valkyrie in the thigh and then the knee. Valkyrie loses the perfect position for half a heartbeat. Emily spins through beneath her and explodes up with a rough headbutt to the chest, then a forearm to the jaw, then another to the throat line that sends Valkyrie staggering backward.

Mark Bravo: "That's survival right there! Not pretty, but beautiful in its own way!"

Emily sees Valkyrie rocked and surges forward. She drives both shoulders into the challenger's stomach, pushes her into the ropes, and starts unloading with body shots. The crowd rises as Emily turns the fight into exactly what she wants: a hoss fight with elbows and hate and very little elegance.

Emily Hightower: "C'mon! C'mon!"

She whips Valkyrie across the ring and catches her on the rebound with a spine-jarring powerslam-like throw that doesn't quite have textbook form but lands with enough force to jar the entire ring. Emily doesn't cover—can't cover—so instead she immediately grabs the challenger's arm and starts trying to sit back into the Fujiwara armbar again, this time deeper, more urgent, yanking the shoulder at a nasty angle.

John Phillips: "Fujiwara armbar from Emily!"

Mark Bravo: "Now this is where the lack of rope breaks becomes terrifying for Valkyrie!"

Emily cranks back hard and Valkyrie's face finally changes. The cold expression cracks into visible strain as she reaches for the rope out of habit, touches it, and gets nothing for it but the realization of the rules.

John Phillips: "She found the rope, but it doesn't matter!"

Mark Bravo: "Exactly! There are no lifelines left!"

Emily leans back even harder and Valkyrie has to think now. She rolls her hips once. Then again. Emily hangs on and twists the wrist. Valkyrie growls through gritted teeth and finally uses brute force, pulling Emily's entire body with her into a roll. The hold stays on for a second. Then another. Then Valkyrie stacks all her weight forward and deadlifts Emily by sheer force, lifting her partially off the mat before dropping her shoulder-first into the turnbuckles.

John Phillips: "What power!"

Mark Bravo: "That's one way out of an armbar!"

Emily spills away from the corner clutching her shoulder. Valkyrie shakes life back into her arm, then storms forward and drills Emily with a running big boot that turns her inside out and leaves her sprawled near center.

John Phillips: "Valkyrie is trying to take over again!"

The challenger doesn't wait. She drags Emily up by the hairline and waistband, hooks her high, and this time gets all the way into the setup for the Valknut Driver. Emily's body goes up. The crowd gasps. Valkyrie turns and drives her down with the high-angle sit-out Michinoku Driver.

Mark Bravo: "She got it!"

John Phillips: "Valknut Driver! Emily Hightower just got planted!"

Emily bounces and rolls to her side on impact, hands immediately going to the neck and upper back. Valkyrie stays seated for a second, breathing heavier now, then crawls over and grabs the leg and head, trying to transition right into the Helheim Clutch while Emily is too stunned to fight it.

John Phillips: "This could be the finish right here! Valkyrie knows she doesn't need to cover, she needs to trap!"

Valkyrie turns the leg. Emily groans. The neck crank begins to come together. The crowd starts screaming for Emily to move, to fight, to do something before the hold is fully set.

Mark Bravo: "If she gets this all the way in, Emily may be done!"

Emily, dazed and half on instinct, reaches not for the ropes this time but blindly for Valkyrie's face. Fingers brush cheek. Then mouth. Then eye line. Not a gouge, not a rake, just enough of a frantic shove into the face to break the perfect stacking of the hold. Valkyrie recoils for a fraction of a second and Emily twists out the open side, rolling toward the ropes again before catching herself and forcing her body back toward center so she doesn't get trapped.

John Phillips: "Emily escaped again!"

Mark Bravo: "She is surviving by inches now!"

Valkyrie gets up angry for the first time all match. Not panicked. Angry. She storms in with a short-arm lariat attempt. Emily ducks. Valkyrie turns and swings again. Emily blocks, then throws a forearm to the jaw. Another. A third. Valkyrie fires back with a forearm of her own that nearly buckles Emily at the knees. Emily answers with a headbutt. Valkyrie answers with a knee. Emily answers with a slap across the face that turns the whole crowd electric.

Mark Bravo: "Oh, she just woke Valkyrie up."

And she does.

Valkyrie snarls and swings with everything on a short-arm lariat.

Emily ducks under it and hits the ropes.

Comes flying back with Ode To My Father.

The bull-hammer-style elbow lands flush on the side of Valkyrie's head.

John Phillips: "Ode To My Father!"

Valkyrie staggers but doesn't fall.

Emily sees it and roars, hitting the ropes again, coming back with Hit And Run—the splash into the ropes, then the full-tilt big boot.

This time Valkyrie does go down.

Mark Bravo: "There it is! There it is!"

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower has Valkyrie Knox on the mat!"

The crowd is thunderous now. Emily drops to one knee beside Valkyrie, exhausted, sweat dripping, shoulder hurting, leg hurting, neck hurting, but the opening is there. She looks at Valkyrie. Looks at the turnbuckles. Looks back down.

Mark Bravo: "She's thinking big."

Emily rises and heads for the corner. Not quickly. Not cleanly. But decisively. She starts climbing, one hand on the top rope, one boot then the next, dragging all the accumulated punishment up there with her.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower is going up!"

Mark Bravo: "This is a gamble. A huge one. But if she hits this, it could be the opening she needs to snatch a submission after the crash."

Emily reaches the top and looks down.

Below her, Valkyrie is stirring.

The challenger rolls to one knee.

Then two boots.

Emily launches anyway.

Crash Landing from the top, the flipping rebound moonsault with extra height and extra desperation behind it—but Valkyrie rolls.

Emily crashes hard into the mat.

John Phillips: "Nobody home!"

Mark Bravo: "Oh, that may have just changed everything!"

Emily spills onto her back clutching at her ribs and shoulder, gasping, while Valkyrie gets up through the pain with the grim certainty of a predator who just watched the prey injure itself trying to fly away.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower gambled big and missed, and now Valkyrie Knox is rising again."

Mark Bravo: "And with no rope breaks left and submission or stoppage only... this next stretch could decide the championship."

Valkyrie steps forward.

Emily tries to roll away.

And the challenger reaches down for her.

Valkyrie Knox steps forward over the wreckage of Emily Hightower's missed moonsault, breathing hard now but still carrying herself like the punishment belongs to somebody else. Emily is on her back clutching at her ribs and shoulder, gasping, trying to roll toward space that no longer feels safe.

John Phillips: "That miss hurt Emily badly, and Valkyrie knows exactly what this opportunity looks like."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and under these rules you don't need to score points. You need to damage people until they can't fight back."

Valkyrie reaches down, grabs a handful of Emily's hair and gear, and drags her to one knee. Emily tries to throw a forearm from down low, but there isn't much on it. Valkyrie shrugs it off and drives a brutal knee into the chest. Then another. Then a short forearm across the back of the neck that sends Emily spilling face-first to the mat.

John Phillips: "Valkyrie pouring it on now!"

Emily pushes up again on instinct alone. Valkyrie catches her with a running big boot to the side of the head that sends her rolling toward the ropes. Emily grabs the bottom strand, but there is no comfort there now. Valkyrie stalks in and stomps the ribs once, then once more, then drags Emily backward by the ankle into open space.

Mark Bravo: "That's the worst part. You crawl to the ropes because your body wants safety, but there is none left there."

Valkyrie hooks both legs and starts turning Emily over again, clearly thinking Helheim Clutch, but Emily starts fighting the hold before it ever locks. She twists on one hip, boots the bad leg free, and catches Valkyrie with a heel to the knee. Valkyrie loses the clean angle for half a second.

Emily uses all of it.

She rolls through, pops to one knee, and blasts Valkyrie with a forearm to the jaw.

Then another.

Then a third that sends the challenger backward a full step.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower is fighting back again!"

Mark Bravo: "That junkyard streak just will not die!"

Emily gets to her feet now, hurting everywhere but swinging anyway. Valkyrie steps back in and throws a short-arm lariat. Emily ducks under it, drives a shoulder into the midsection, and runs Valkyrie backward into the corner. The crowd rises as Emily begins unloading with rough body shots and heavy forearms, turning the clean title fight into a full-fledged scrap.

Emily Hightower: "Stay down! Stay down!"

She backs up and charges in with a corner splash. Valkyrie absorbs it but gets rocked. Emily bounces off the ropes and comes back with Hit And Run, smashing the big boot into Valkyrie's face and chest. This time Valkyrie doesn't just stumble—she falls to a knee.

John Phillips: "Hit And Run again!"

Emily sees the opening and keeps pouring it on. She snatches Valkyrie up and snaps her over with a suplex, then rises with a roar from the crowd and points down at the challenger like she can feel the title slipping within reach. Valkyrie tries to rise on instinct. Emily catches her with Ode To My Father, the bull-hammer elbow landing flush again and finally taking Valkyrie fully off her feet.

Mark Bravo: "She cracked her clean!"

John Phillips: "Emily has the upper hand again!"

The building is roaring now as Emily drops down and immediately starts reaching for the arm and shoulder, looking for another Fujiwara armbar transition while Valkyrie is stunned. Emily drags her away from the ropes, trying to keep the whole ring small and ugly and inescapable.

John Phillips: "Smart positioning from Emily! She knows there are no rope breaks left, but she still wants Valkyrie trapped dead center!"

Then the crowd noise changes.

Not a full pop.

Not a boo at first.

That shifting, unsettled rumble that happens when people see movement where there should not be any.

Mark Bravo: "Oh, come on..."

The camera swings toward the stage side entrance.

No music.

No announcement.

Just two familiar figures stepping out with purpose.

Trey Mack.

Clovis Black.

Together, side by side, heading straight for ringside.

John Phillips: "No. No, no, no. Here come Trey Mack and Clovis Black!"

Mark Bravo: "And that is exactly what this match did not need."

They don't sprint. They don't posture. Trey has that ugly confidence on his face, the kind that says he knows exactly what kind of message his presence sends. Clovis is all business, silent and grim, walking like a man arriving to support violence, not stop it.

John Phillips: "Valkyrie Knox came out alone, but now the Empire is making its way to ringside!"

Mark Bravo: "And whether they touch anybody or not, this changes the air immediately."

Inside the ring, Emily sees them.

Her head snaps toward the aisle for just a second.

Valkyrie sees that too.

Of course she does.

She shoves Emily off the arm attempt and scrambles backward to a knee while Trey and Clovis continue their march to the floor.

John Phillips: "That distraction may have just bought Valkyrie Knox the second she desperately needed!"

Emily rises and glares out toward the ring as Trey and Clovis each take a side at ringside, not entering the match, not touching anyone, but absolutely there now, absolutely present, absolutely supporting Valkyrie Knox in the deepest stretch of this championship fight.

Mark Bravo: "And now the pressure changes all over again. Emily Hightower had the upper hand. Now she's got Empire eyes on every side of the ring."

In the ring, Valkyrie gets to her feet slowly, shaking the cobwebs loose, while Emily remains turned halfway toward the floor, fury building in her face.

Trey spreads his hands with a smirk.

Clovis says nothing.

And the title match suddenly feels a whole lot more dangerous.

Emily Hightower glares out at ringside, fury all over her face as Trey Mack and Clovis Black settle in on opposite sides of the floor like they own the place. In the ring, Valkyrie Knox uses the moment to gather herself, shaking the fog loose and rising slower but steadier than before.

John Phillips: "This is exactly what Emily did not need."

Mark Bravo: "Nope. She had momentum, she had Valkyrie hurt, and now suddenly she's got two more Empire problems staring holes through her from the floor."

Emily turns back toward the ring just in time for Valkyrie to drive a hard forearm into the side of her head. Emily stumbles. Valkyrie follows with a knee to the ribs, then another short clubbing shot across the upper back, reasserting herself with brute force and ugly timing.

John Phillips: "Valkyrie making Emily pay for even that split-second distraction!"

Valkyrie grabs a front facelock and starts dragging Emily toward the ropes nearest Trey Mack. Emily fights the pull with body shots, but Valkyrie powers her in that direction anyway. Trey, from the floor, leans up onto the apron just enough to slap his hands and bark at Valkyrie.

Trey Mack: "Break her down! C'mon, Valk!"

That alone gets Emily's attention for a heartbeat, and Valkyrie capitalizes with a short throw that dumps her shoulder-first into the middle rope.

Mark Bravo: "There's the first little piece of it. Not enough to throw the match, but just enough to let Emily know she's surrounded again."

Emily grabs the ropes and pulls herself up. Valkyrie charges in, but Emily gets a boot up to the face. Valkyrie staggers. Emily comes out of the corner with a forearm, then another, then another, backing Valkyrie up with pure junkyard stubbornness. Trey slaps the apron once harder this time.

Trey Mack: "Watch the elbow! Watch the elbow!"

John Phillips: "Trey Mack shouting instructions from the floor!"

Emily hears it, snarls, and snaps back toward the ropes on that side.

Emily Hightower: "Shut your mouth!"

That gives Valkyrie a chance to swing with a short-arm lariat. Emily ducks under it, hits the ropes, and comes flying back with a running shoulder that finally rocks the bigger woman backward. Valkyrie tries to answer, but Emily is on her now with rough body shots, an elbow to the jaw, and a knee to the stomach that doubles Valkyrie over.

John Phillips: "Emily fighting through it!"

Mark Bravo: "That's what makes her dangerous. The more this turns into a bad situation, the more natural it feels for her."

Emily hooks Valkyrie around the waist and muscles her into a rough release suplex. Valkyrie lands hard and rolls toward the opposite side—right where Clovis Black is standing. Clovis reaches up and grabs the top rope, shaking it once as Valkyrie gets a hand on the bottom strand to rise.

John Phillips: "Oh, come on! Now Clovis is doing it too!"

Mark Bravo: "Still not a direct attack, but they are absolutely getting involved."

The referee sees it this time and immediately steps toward the ropes, pointing out at Clovis.

Referee: "Enough! Both of you! Back off or I'll throw this whole thing out!"

Trey throws his hands up with an innocent grin. Clovis doesn't move much, just lowers his hands and stares through the referee like he's not worth responding to.

John Phillips: "The referee has seen enough. He's warning both Trey Mack and Clovis Black right now!"

Mark Bravo: "And that's the tightrope. They want to tilt the fight without actually crossing the line far enough to get Valkyrie disqualified."

Inside the ring, Emily sees all of it and her whole face changes. Not fear. Not panic.

Boiling anger.

She storms across the ring, yanks Valkyrie up, and blasts her with a forearm so hard it turns her halfway around. Then

another. Then a third that sends sweat flying into the lights. Valkyrie throws a wild shot back, but Emily steps inside and drives both women into the corner with a shoulder to the stomach.

Emily Hightower: "You want help?! You need help?!"

John Phillips: "Emily is furious now!"

She drags Valkyrie out of the corner and spikes her with Burn Out, the tornado double-arm DDT driving the challenger down hard near center ring. The crowd explodes as Emily rolls through to her knees and pounds the mat once, everything in her body language screaming that she is not going to let this get stolen from her.

Mark Bravo: "That's the answer! That's exactly the answer!"

Emily immediately reaches for the arm again, trying to turn Valkyrie over into the Fujiwara armbar. Trey hops up on the apron, shouting at the referee.

Trey Mack: "Hey! Watch the shoulder! She's cranking the hell out of it!"

John Phillips: "Trey Mack trying to get into the referee's ear now!"

The referee steps toward him to order him down, and in that same second Clovis moves around the far side of the ring like he's considering stepping up too. The crowd noise shifts again, seeing disaster brewing from all directions.

Referee: "Off the apron! Both of you back up right now!"

And then the building erupts.

Not because of anything in the ring.

Because from the stage side, three familiar figures come storming back out.

David Hightower first, shouting before he's even halfway visible.

Buck Hightower right behind him, all forward motion and bad intentions.

Dakota Hightower just behind them, fast and calm and looking like she already knows exactly where she needs to be.

John Phillips: "The Hightowers are back!"

Mark Bravo: "And now all hell is about to break loose!"

Trey sees them first and drops off the apron, turning toward the aisle with both hands out like he can't believe they'd dare. David doesn't slow down.

David Hightower: "Oh, now y'all wanna play ringside games?!"

Buck goes straight for Clovis Black.

No speech.

No warning.

Just a full-force forearm to the jaw that starts the brawl instantly.

John Phillips: "Buck and Clovis are throwing down!"

Clovis answers with a clubbing right hand. Buck fires back two of his own. The two big men collide at ringside like a truck wreck, trading brutal shots and shoving each other into the barricade.

Mark Bravo: "That was inevitable! Those two were never gonna talk this out!"

On the other side, Trey Mack starts jawing at David Hightower, but Dakota slides in first with quick precision, cutting him off with a sharp forearm and then another. Trey backs up in surprise more than pain before David barrels in and

tackles him against the apron.

John Phillips: "Dakota and David taking it to Trey Mack!"

Mark Bravo: "And Dakota's doing exactly what she always does—fast, clean, efficient, and then let Dad start yelling over it!"

The referee spins from side to side, completely losing control of the ringside environment while still trying not to throw the match out unless somebody directly enters and interferes in the ring itself.

Referee: "Get back! All of you get back!"

Inside the ring, Emily has stopped cold and is staring out at the chaos she specifically tried to avoid. Across from her, Valkyrie Knox rises to one knee, just as angry, just as distracted, just as aware that the fight around them has now become impossible to ignore.

John Phillips: "This whole thing is detonating at ringside!"

Mark Bravo: "And somehow the match is still alive, but for how long?!"

At the barricade, Buck and Clovis are still slugging it out. David is screaming at Trey while trying to shove him into the apron edge. Dakota circles like a shark, waiting for another opening. The official is at his wit's end. The crowd is absolutely losing its mind.

And in the ring, Emily and Valkyrie lock eyes again, both knowing the title still hasn't been decided—but the storm around them just got a whole lot louder.

The ringside area has completely dissolved into madness.

Buck Hightower and Clovis Black are hammering each other against the barricade in a storm of forearms and shoulders. David Hightower is still shouting while trying to shove Trey Mack backward into the apron. Dakota Hightower is moving in and out of the chaos with quick, sharp shots whenever Trey leaves an opening.

The crowd is thunderous.

The referee is losing his mind.

And in the ring, the title match is hanging by a thread.

John Phillips: "This is anarchy!"

Mark Bravo: "No, this is worse than anarchy! This is family pride and Empire arrogance crashing into each other all at once!"

Emily Hightower stands near center ring, fists clenched, staring out at the disaster around her like she can't believe this is happening anyway after everything she said. Across from her, Valkyrie Knox is on one knee, glaring toward Trey and Clovis with equal fury.

Emily Hightower: "GET OUT OF HERE!"

Valkyrie Knox: "LEAVE IT!"

John Phillips: "Both women are screaming for their people to get out!"

Mark Bravo: "Because they know exactly what this is doing! They know this is swallowing their match alive!"

Outside, nobody listens.

Buck blasts Clovis with a forearm that sends him stumbling into the timekeeper's area. Clovis answers with a violent shove that launches Buck into the barricade. Trey Mack slips Dakota for a second and starts jawing with David, who is

yelling right back, red-faced and wild-eyed.

Referee: "Enough! Enough! Back off! All of you back off!"

He leans through the ropes, pointing from one side of the floor to the other, trying to regain control of something that no longer wants to be controlled.

And then it gets worse.

With Buck and Dakota occupied outside, David Hightower suddenly grabs the apron and slides into the ring.

John Phillips: "No! Not in the ring!"

Mark Bravo: "David just slid into the match!"

The building erupts again as David pops to his knees inside the ropes, not with a weapon, not even with a clean plan, just with that same stubborn Hightower certainty that he belongs wherever the fight is hottest.

Emily turns and sees him.

And her face drops.

Not just anger now.

Hurt.

Exhausted, honest hurt.

Emily Hightower: "No..."

She takes two quick steps toward him, hands out like she can physically stop the whole night from breaking apart if she gets there fast enough.

Emily Hightower: "Dad, no. Please. Go."

John Phillips: "Listen to her!"

Mark Bravo: "That ain't frustration anymore. She is pleading with him."

David gets up to one knee and points out toward the floor.

David Hightower: "They started this!"

Emily Hightower: "I don't care! Get out!"

The referee is right there now, stepping between David and the rest of the ring, arms out, voice cracking with authority and panic.

Referee: "Out! Out right now! Everybody out! You too! Get out of this ring!"

On the floor, Trey and Dakota are still tangling. Buck and Clovis are still trading clubbing shots. Valkyrie Knox is back on her feet now, breathing hard, watching the whole thing with cold disgust.

Valkyrie Knox: "This is pathetic."

Emily hears her, but she can't even answer. Her eyes are still locked on David.

Emily Hightower: "I asked you for one thing."

Emily Hightower: "Please."

That last word is quiet.

Too quiet for the crowd, but not too quiet for the camera.

The referee has had enough.

He turns to the ropes and points violently toward ringside, then the ramp, then the back.

Referee: "That's it! All of you! Out!"

Referee: "The Empire, the Hightowers, everybody! You are all ejected!"

John Phillips: "He threw them all out!"

Mark Bravo: "Finally! Finally!"

The crowd roars as the official keeps pointing and shouting, forcing the issue now.

Referee: "Backstage! Now! Move!"

Buck hears it first and backs off Clovis just enough to glare at him before pointing toward the back like he's promising this is not finished. Clovis wipes his mouth and smirks without smiling, then turns with Trey as the Empire starts retreating in furious disbelief.

Trey Mack: "You kidding me?!"

Referee: "Go!"

Dakota grabs David by the arm and starts pulling him toward the ropes, trying to get him moving before this gets even worse. David argues the whole way, still trying to shout explanations nobody wants to hear.

David Hightower: "I was helping!"

Emily Hightower: "That's the problem!"

The line cuts him.

Actually cuts him.

For once, David goes quiet.

As the Hightowers and the Empire are all forced away from ringside, Emily stands in the middle of the ring, breathing hard, shoulders rising and falling, and her face says everything.

She is angry.

She is embarrassed.

And more than anything, she is hurt.

John Phillips: "Look at Emily Hightower..."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. That's not relief on her face. That's heartbreak."

Emily looks toward the aisle as her family is shoved farther up the ramp. Dakota glances back with obvious regret. Buck looks like he wants to come back and break something. David is still fuming, but even he can feel what he just did.

Emily's eyes stay on them one second too long.

And Valkyrie Knox sees it.

Of course she does.

John Phillips: "No..."

Mark Bravo: "Turn around, Emily!"

Valkyrie surges forward from behind.

She clubs Emily across the upper back with a savage forearm that drives her down to both knees.

John Phillips: "Valkyrie from behind!"

Emily cries out and tries to turn, but Valkyrie is on her immediately, grabbing the leg, stepping over, and wrenching the body into Helheim Clutch.

Mark Bravo: "She's got it! She's got it all the way in!"

This time there is no imperfect angle.

No half-counter.

No rope break left.

No rescue.

Valkyrie stands over Emily and bends her in opposite directions, legs trapped, spine torqued, neck cranked back in brutal symmetry. Emily screams instantly, both hands clawing at the mat, body trying to crawl somewhere that does not exist anymore.

John Phillips: "Emily is trapped!"

Mark Bravo: "And she is caught in the middle! There is nowhere to go!"

Valkyrie leans back harder, face twisted now, not in panic but in punishing purpose. Emily fights it for a few desperate seconds, dragging her palms across the canvas, trying to twist her hips free, trying anything at all.

Emily Hightower: "AHHHH! DAMN IT!"

Referee: "Emily! Emily, talk to me! Do you give?"

Emily shakes her head once.

Then screams again.

Valkyrie cranks deeper.

John Phillips: "This is the danger of Fighting Championship Rules! One moment of distraction, one clean hold, and the whole match can disappear!"

Mark Bravo: "And Emily's emotional aftershock just gave Valkyrie the window!"

Emily tries to rise on her hands, but the neck crank drags her back down. Her leg kicks uselessly. Her free hand slaps the mat once in frustration, but not surrender. The referee leans lower, seeing the pain in her face, seeing the body language break down.

Referee: "Emily! You have to answer me!"

Emily reaches once more toward the ropes.

Then remembers.

Too late.

No rope breaks.

No escape.

Only pain.

Valkyrie wrenches back one final time.

Emily Hightower: "AAAAH—FINE! FINE!"

Referee: "She gave! She gave!"

DING DING DING!

John Phillips: "It's over! Valkyrie Knoxx has done it!"

Mark Bravo: "What a brutal ending!"

Valkyrie releases the hold and rises slowly, chest heaving, eyes cold again as the reality of the moment sinks into the building. Emily stays down on the mat, curled on one side, clutching at her back and neck, devastated in more ways than one.

Ring Announcer: "Here is your winner... and the NEW UTA Fighting Champion..."

Ring Announcer: "VALKYRIE KNOXX!"

The crowd gives a mixed, chaotic reaction—boos for the way the moment was stolen, shock at the title change, and a hard kind of respect for how Valkyrie seized the opening the instant it appeared.

John Phillips: "Valkyrie Knoxx took advantage of the chaos, the heartbreak, and the briefest hesitation... and under these rules, that was all she needed."

Mark Bravo: "That's the cruel part. Emily was right to want them gone. But by the time they were finally gone, the damage was already done."

The referee takes the title and brings it to Valkyrie. She snatches it from his hands and raises it high over the fallen Emily Hightower, who can only look up from the mat through pain and disbelief.

At the top of the ramp, the Hightowers have stopped walking.

David stares down in disbelief.

Buck looks ready to tear the arena apart.

Dakota just looks sick.

On the opposite side, Trey Mack and Clovis Black have stopped too, both turning back to admire what their presence helped create without ever needing to stay long enough to be part of the finish itself.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower wanted this fight to be hers."

Mark Bravo: "And in the end, everybody else made sure it wasn't."

The final image is ugly and unforgettable.

Valkyrie Knoxx standing tall with the Fighting Championship raised high.

Emily Hightower broken on the mat beneath her.

And every person both women told to stay out... staring back from the aisle after helping decide it anyway.

Fear the Reapers

Segment

The scene cuts backstage.

Melissa Cartwright stands in front of a black-and-gold VICTORIOUS backdrop, microphone in hand, trying to reset herself after the chaos and controversy that has defined so much of the night already.

Melissa Cartwright: "Melissa Cartwright here backstage, and what a night it has already been at Victorious."

Melissa Cartwright: "We have seen championships change hands, shocking returns, and absolute chaos from top to bottom."

Melissa Cartwright: "And now, standing with me, is former UTA Champion Chris Ross."

The camera widens.

Chris Ross is already there, pacing just enough that it feels like even standing still would be asking too much of him. His jaw is locked. His eyes are hard. His breathing is steady, but only in the way a bomb can look stable right before it goes off. He does not look interested in interviews, reflection, or the night as a whole.

He looks interested in one thing.

Violence.

Melissa Cartwright: "Chris, before we get to your match later tonight, I have to ask—what are your thoughts on everything we've seen so far, especially that last match and the controversy surrounding the Fighting Championship?"

Ross doesn't even look at her right away.

He just stares ahead.

Chris Ross: "I don't care."

Melissa Cartwright: "And with your six-man tag later tonight, do you have any idea who your partner is going to be? You and Samuel Scythe still have one—"

Chris Ross: "I don't care about that either."

Now he looks at her.

Not cruelly.

Just with zero patience left for anything that doesn't involve the name currently burning in his head.

Chris Ross: "I care about Maxwell Jett."

Chris Ross: "I care about gettin' my hands on Maxwell Jett."

Chris Ross: "I care about ripping his God damn head off."

Melissa blinks once, absorbing the heat in his voice.

Melissa Cartwright: "So it sounds like your focus is still entirely on the former champion and what happened between the two of—"

Voice Off Camera: "Good. Good."

The voice cuts in smooth.

Measured.

Almost pleased.

Melissa turns first.

Ross turns slower.

And his expression says immediately that even now, even here, even with allies nearby, his fuse is still short.

Ace Andrews steps into frame wearing that same expensive confidence like it was tailored onto him. Beside him comes

Samuel Scythe, hood down, shoulders squared, silent as ever, the physical embodiment of bad things waiting for permission.

John Phillips: "And now Ace Andrews and Samuel Scythe have arrived."

Mark Bravo: "That is not exactly a calming development."

Ace smiles faintly, glancing from Melissa to Ross to the camera, immediately taking command of the atmosphere without ever needing to raise his voice.

Ace Andrews: "That is exactly the mindset I wanted to hear."

Ross says nothing.

He just stares at Ace.

That stare is not friendly.

Not trusting.

Not thankful.

Just angry, focused, and barely tolerant.

Ace Andrews: "You see, Melissa, tonight isn't about speculation."

Ace Andrews: "It isn't about who's surprised by what."

Ace Andrews: "And it certainly isn't about giving Maxwell Jett and his little Rich Young entourage one more smug little night to pretend they've outsmarted everybody."

Ace steps a little closer to the camera now, fully taking over the segment exactly as Ross allows it.

Ace Andrews: "Tonight, these men..."

He gestures first to Ross.

Ace Andrews: "Chris Ross."

Then to the man beside him.

Ace Andrews: "Samuel Scythe."

Ace Andrews: "They are going to make Maxwell Jett and the Rich Young GRAPPLRZ reap what they sow."

Melissa Cartwright: "So you seem very confident in the team heading into this match."

Ace Andrews: "Confident?"

He smirks.

Ace Andrews: "No, Melissa. I'm informed."

Ace Andrews: "I know what Chris Ross is when somebody gives him a reason."

Ace Andrews: "And I know exactly what Samuel Scythe is when he's pointed at a target and told to walk through it."

Ace turns slightly toward Scythe.

Ace Andrews: "And tonight..."

Ace Andrews: "This is Samuel Scythe's opportunity."

Ace Andrews: "His opportunity to show this entire company exactly what he is capable of."

Samuel Scythe finally speaks.

His voice is low.

Flat.

Like a grave being opened one shovel at a time.

Samuel Scythe: "I'm ready."

Samuel Scythe: "They'll learn."

Ross snorts at that, not mocking, not amused, just overflowing with the kind of fury that doesn't leave room for diplomacy. He paces one short step, then another, jaw flexing.

Melissa Cartwright: "Chris, do you agree with Ace that tonight is about sending a message?"

Ross looks at her like the question annoys him on principle.

Chris Ross: "I ain't sendin' no message."

Chris Ross: "Messages are for people that still wanna talk."

He turns his head slightly, eyes narrowing, a snarl creeping into his face even as Ace stands right there beside him.

Chris Ross: "I want Maxwell."

Chris Ross: "That's it."

Chris Ross: "Ace can say whatever pretty little words he wants."

Chris Ross: "Samuel can break whoever gets in front of him."

Chris Ross: "Good."

Chris Ross: "But when I get my hands on Max..."

He leans slightly toward the camera now, lips peeled back just enough to show the rage underneath.

Chris Ross: "I'm gonna make that son of a bitch regret breathin'."

John Phillips: "Chris Ross is locked all the way in."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and the scary part is he barely sounds like he's talking to us. He sounds like he's already talking to Maxwell Jett in his own head."

Ace keeps that same corporate smile, but even he seems to understand that Ross is not a man to be redirected right now. He can frame the violence. He can package it. He can speak over it. But he cannot cool it down.

Ace Andrews: "Then perhaps that's all anybody needs to know."

Ace Andrews: "Chris Ross wants Maxwell Jett."

Ace Andrews: "Samuel Scythe is ready to leave bodies in the way."

Ace Andrews: "And when this is over, the Rich Young GRAPPLRZ may very well realize they should have stayed rich, young, and far away from Reapers."

Ross snarls again at the word.

Not because he disagrees.

Because he is tired of talking.

Chris Ross: "You done?"

Ace glances sideways at him and gives the faintest nod.

Ace Andrews: "For now."

Ross stares ahead again, chest rising and falling.

Samuel Scythe stands there like a looming execution waiting for the signal.

Melissa, wisely, realizes there is not much more to get from this moment without risking being caught in it.

Melissa Cartwright: "Chris Ross, Samuel Scythe, Ace Andrews..."

Melissa Cartwright: "Clearly ready for war later tonight."

Ross doesn't respond.

He just keeps staring off-camera, somewhere in the direction of a man he still wants to tear apart.

The segment fades with Ace composed, Scythe still, and Chris Ross vibrating with focused, ugly rage.

I Told You to Stay Back Here

Segment

The scene cuts backstage.

And unlike the polished interview area we just left, this part of the building feels raw.

Concrete walls.

Rolling cases.

Crew members trying very hard to stay out of the way.

Then Emily Hightower comes storming into frame.

She is still in her gear. Still sweating. Still hurting. One arm is wrapped tight across her body, the shoulder and upper arm clearly bothering her after the punishment from Valkyrie Knox and that final Helheim Clutch. Her face is red with anger, eyes wet but refusing to break, jaw clenched like she is holding together ten different emotions by force alone.

John Phillips: "And here comes Emily Hightower."

Mark Bravo: "And she looks exactly how you'd expect after that ending. Hurt. Furious. And I don't think that anger is for Valkyrie."

Emily shoves past a pair of stagehands who immediately flatten themselves against the wall to avoid getting caught in the blast radius of whatever is about to happen next.

Emily Hightower: "Where are they?! Where are they at?!"

She rounds a corner hard and finds them.

The rest of the Hightowers are standing together in the hallway.

Buck Hightower first, still looking like he'd happily go right back out there and finish what started with Clovis Black.

Dakota beside him, face tight with guilt even before Emily says a word.

And David Hightower, arms folded, posture already defensive in that way proud men get when they know they've messed something up but haven't yet decided they're willing to admit it.

Emily stops cold in front of them.

Her hurt arm hangs for a second before she grabs at it with the other hand, more from instinct than weakness. She is

shaking now. Not out of fear.

Out of rage.

Emily Hightower: "I told y'all to stay in the back!"

The hallway goes silent around them.

John Phillips: "There it is."

Mark Bravo: "And every word of that has been building all night."

David opens his mouth first, of course he does.

David Hightower: "Now hold on—"

Emily Hightower: "No!"

She cuts him off instantly, taking one hard step forward.

Emily Hightower: "No, don't you start that with me!"

Emily Hightower: "I said stay in the back!"

Emily Hightower: "I said let me fight my own damn fight!"

Emily Hightower: "And what did y'all do?"

She throws her good hand out in disgust.

Emily Hightower: "Exactly what you always do!"

Dakota tries to step in gently.

Dakota Hightower: "Em..."

Emily Hightower: "No, Dakota. No."

That one hurts Dakota. You can see it immediately. But Emily is too far gone now to soften any of it.

Emily Hightower: "I don't wanna hear nothin' right now."

Emily Hightower: "I told every one of y'all what I needed."

Emily Hightower: "Not guessed."

Emily Hightower: "Not suggested."

Emily Hightower: "Told."

Emily Hightower: "And none of y'all listened."

Mark Bravo: "That's the key right there. This ain't just about the loss. It's about Emily telling them plain as day what she needed and getting ignored anyway."

Buck shifts his weight, jaw tightening.

Buck Hightower: "They came down there first."

Emily Hightower: "I don't care!"

That answer hits like a gunshot.

Emily Hightower: "You hear me?"

Emily Hightower: "I do not care who came down there first!"

Emily Hightower: "I had it!"

Emily Hightower: "I had her hurt!"

Emily Hightower: "And then all of you turned my title match into another damn family mess!"

David finally unfolds his arms and steps forward, pride already getting louder than reason.

David Hightower: "Family mess?"

David Hightower: "We came down there because those Empire boys were sticking their noses where they didn't belong."

David Hightower: "We were protectin' you."

Emily Hightower: "I didn't ask you to."

David Hightower: "You shouldn't have had to!"

Emily takes another step closer now, face to face with him.

Emily Hightower: "That's the whole damn problem!"

Emily Hightower: "You never ask what I need!"

Emily Hightower: "You just decide!"

Emily Hightower: "You decide what my match needs."

Emily Hightower: "You decide what help looks like."

Emily Hightower: "You decide where the line is."

Emily Hightower: "And then I'm the one left standing in the ring payin' for it!"

John Phillips: "Emily is unloading every bit of this now."

Mark Bravo: "Because this isn't a one-night issue. This has been boiling for weeks."

Dakota looks down, then back up, trying to find the right place to stand inside this. Buck's breathing is heavier now too, not angry at Emily, but clearly not happy being talked to like this after doing what he thought was right. David, meanwhile, is moving into that dangerous territory where stubborn fathers confuse love with authority.

David Hightower: "You act like we cost you that match."

Emily stares at him.

Actually stares.

And the disappointment in her face somehow hits even harder than the yelling did.

Emily Hightower: "You did."

Silence.

Real silence this time.

Emily Hightower: "Maybe not with your own hands."

Emily Hightower: "Maybe not in the official record."

Emily Hightower: "But yeah, Dad."

Emily Hightower: "You did."

David's face hardens instantly.

David Hightower: "That's bullshit."

Emily Hightower: "No."

Emily Hightower: "Bullshit is me beggin' y'all to stay out of it and watchin' you come out anyway."

Emily Hightower: "Bullshit is me standin' there in the middle of the ring, embarrassed outta my mind, while the referee has to throw everybody out because nobody can listen for five damn minutes."

Emily Hightower: "Bullshit is me turnin' my head to watch my own family get dragged away when I should've been focused on the woman right in front of me."

She points to her arm now, then to her neck and shoulder.

Emily Hightower: "And bullshit is me standin' here hurt and empty while Valkyrie walks out with that title because all of y'all just had to make it about you."

Mark Bravo: "There's the wound. Right there."

Dakota takes a small step forward, voice quieter now.

Dakota Hightower: "Emily... we didn't mean for that to happen."

Emily Hightower: "I know."

That answer comes faster than anything else she's said.

And somehow that makes it sadder.

Emily Hightower: "I know y'all didn't mean it."

Emily Hightower: "That don't make it any better."

Buck finally speaks again, blunt as ever.

Buck Hightower: "So what, we just let Empire boys come down there and stand over you?"

Emily Hightower: "No."

Buck Hightower: "Then what?"

Emily Hightower: "You trust me."

Buck says nothing.

Emily Hightower: "That's what."

Emily Hightower: "You trust me to fight my own fight."

Emily Hightower: "You trust me to handle the moment."

Emily Hightower: "And if I say stay in the back..."

She points between all three of them now.

Emily Hightower: "You stay in the back."

David shakes his head, still unable to let go of his own version of right and wrong.

David Hightower: "That ain't how family works."

Emily Hightower: "Then maybe that's why this keeps happenin'."

That one lands hardest of all.

Even David has no quick answer for it.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower is not just angry. She is hurt in a way that goes deeper than losing a title match."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. Because in her mind, she didn't just lose to Valkyrie. She lost the one thing she's been fighting for just as hard as the championship—control over her own damn career."

Emily takes a long breath through her nose, trying to settle herself and failing. She winces slightly as her hurt arm shifts again, and that physical pain seems to remind everybody just how much she gave up in that ring before this conversation ever started.

Emily Hightower: "I told y'all to stay in the back."

She says it one more time.

Not loud now.

Just tired.

Emily Hightower: "And none of you listened."

Dakota's eyes drop.

Buck looks away.

David keeps his chin up, but even he can feel the weight of it now.

Emily takes a step backward from them.

Then another.

Not because she's afraid.

Because she is done.

Emily Hightower: "I can't do this right now."

She turns and starts walking away down the hallway, still holding her arm, still furious, still hurting, still too proud to let anybody see exactly how deep this one cut.

Dakota Hightower: "Emily—"

Emily Hightower: "No."

She doesn't even turn back when she says it.

Emily Hightower: "Just... no."

The camera lingers on the Hightowers after she leaves.

Dakota looks heartbroken.

Buck looks conflicted.

David looks like a man who still wants to argue, but for once doesn't quite know how.

John Phillips: "Emily Hightower's title match is over."

Mark Bravo: "But that family fight? Not even close."

To the Next One

Segment

The scene cuts away from the tense concrete hallway and into a much different room.

The Empire locker room is alive.

Not chaotic.

Controlled.

Victorious.

Purple and gold lighting glows softly across the room, reflecting off title plates and expensive bottles already cracked open in celebration. The atmosphere is smug, satisfied, and just a little dangerous, the kind of mood that only comes when a group believes the night is bending exactly the way it should.

John Phillips: "Well, on one side of the backstage area you have heartbreak and blame."

Mark Bravo: "And on this side? You got a party."

The camera catches Trey Mack first, pacing with a grin on his face, clapping his hands together once and laughing like a man who called his shot and gets to enjoy the replay. Clovis Black leans against a row of lockers with arms folded, not smiling much, but clearly carrying that heavy, satisfied calm of a man who knows things went his side's way.

Amy Harrison stands in the middle of it all.

Of course she does.

The International Championship is still around her waist, and the smile on her face is not warm. It is proud. Possessive. Cold in the way only Amy can make celebration look.

Amy Harrison: "About damn time."

The locker room door swings open.

And in walks Valkyrie Knoxx.

The new UTA Fighting Champion enters still carrying the energy of battle with her. She is breathing a little heavier than normal, hair damp, shoulders marked by the fight, title gripped tight in one hand rather than draped for show. She looks less like someone arriving to bask in victory and more like someone who has just come back from war and hasn't fully decided whether to sit down or go right back out.

The room erupts around her.

Trey Mack: "There she is!"

John Phillips: "And here comes the new champion."

Trey strides over first, clapping and laughing, pointing at the title like he wants everybody in the world to get a good look at what just happened.

Trey Mack: "That's what I'm talkin' about! That is what I'm talkin' about!"

Trey Mack: "Fighting Champion, baby!"

Clovis Black gives Valkyrie a single nod, short and firm, the kind of respect that means more coming from someone like him than a long speech ever could.

Clovis Black: "Good work."

Valkyrie gives him the slightest return nod, then looks toward Amy.

Amy doesn't rush to her.

She lets the moment breathe first.

Lets Valkyrie stand there with the title.

Lets everybody else orbit the achievement for a second.

Then she steps forward.

Amy Harrison: "Now that..."

She places a hand lightly on the center plate of the championship.

Amy Harrison: "Looks right."

Mark Bravo: "You knew Amy was gonna make this feel like her win too."

Valkyrie doesn't flinch at the touch. Doesn't pull the belt away. But she also doesn't soften. She just stands there, title in hand, eyes fixed on Amy, still carrying too much fight in her body to melt all the way into the celebration.

Amy Harrison: "You did exactly what you were supposed to do."

Amy Harrison: "You weathered the nonsense."

Amy Harrison: "You survived the emotion."

Amy Harrison: "And when it mattered most..."

Amy's smile widens.

Amy Harrison: "You finished it."

Trey raises both hands and shouts toward the ceiling.

Trey Mack: "That's gold on gold! Empire gold, baby!"

John Phillips: "And that is exactly what Amy Harrison wanted. Another championship pulled into her orbit."

Trey grabs a bottle from the table and pops it open. The sharp hiss cuts through the room. He pours a little into a plastic cup and shoves it toward Valkyrie with all the energy in the world. Valkyrie glances at it, then at him, then finally takes it with the same stoic expression she walked in with.

Trey Mack: "C'mon, champ. You earned one."

Clovis steps off the locker now and moves closer, still not flashy, still not loud, but very much part of the wall closing around this celebration. The visual is immediate and strong—Amy with the International Championship. Valkyrie with the Fighting Championship. Trey and Clovis standing close by like the enforcers of an expanding empire.

Amy Harrison: "Do you feel it?"

That question is not to the room. It's to Valkyrie.

Amy Harrison: "Because this is what I was talking about."

Amy Harrison: "This is what the rest of them still don't understand."

Amy Harrison: "It starts with one title."

Amy Harrison: "Then another."

Amy Harrison: "Then another."

She looks down at the title in Valkyrie's hands and then back up again.

Amy Harrison: "And before anybody realizes what happened..."

Amy Harrison: "You hold it all."

Mark Bravo: "There it is. Amy ain't celebrating a moment. She's celebrating a plan."

Valkyrie finally lifts the title and looks at it herself.

Not for the room.

Not for Amy.

For her.

The plate catches the light. Her face stays hard. But there is something there now. Not warmth. Not gratitude. Satisfaction. The deep, private kind that only comes from proving you could do exactly what everybody said you might not.

Valkyrie Knox: "She fought hard."

The room quiets just a little.

Valkyrie Knox: "It didn't matter."

Amy smirks immediately.

Amy Harrison: "Exactly."

Trey laughs again and points toward the title.

Trey Mack: "That's cold. I like that."

Clovis gives another short nod.

Clovis Black: "All that fight."

Clovis Black: "Still lost."

Valkyrie finally takes a sip from the cup, then lowers it, still holding the championship tighter than anything else in the room.

John Phillips: "There is no pity in this room for Emily Hightower."

Mark Bravo: "Nope. Not even a little. They see that ending as proof they were right to be there, right to pressure the moment, right to make it ugly."

Amy circles slightly around Valkyrie now, admiring the full image of it all like a painter stepping back to look at her own work.

Amy Harrison: "Former Women's Champion."

Amy Harrison: "Now Fighting Champion."

Amy Harrison: "I told everyone exactly what was coming."

Amy Harrison: "The problem is they never listen until they have to."

She turns toward Trey and Clovis.

Amy Harrison: "And now look at us."

Trey spreads his arms.

Trey Mack: "Beautiful, ain't it?"

Clovis says nothing.

He doesn't need to.

The room already says enough.

Titles. Bodies. Power. Momentum. A sense that this group is becoming harder and harder to stop every time they add another piece of gold to the pile.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison made the call to get Valkyrie into this match. Valkyrie seized the opportunity. And now the Empire has another title in its grasp."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and if you're the rest of UTA, you better pay attention. Because this ain't random anymore."

Amy raises her cup now.

Amy Harrison: "To the new Fighting Champion."

Trey Mack: "To Valkyrie!"

Clovis Black: "To gold."

Valkyrie lifts her own cup slightly, but her eyes are still on the title, still on the reality of what she now holds.

Valkyrie Knox: "To the next one."

That line changes the room.

Trey grins wider.

Clovis' posture straightens just slightly.

Amy's smile becomes razor-thin and deeply pleased.

Mark Bravo: "Oh, I like that."

John Phillips: "And there is the warning."

The camera slowly backs out as the celebration continues—champagne, applause, smug satisfaction, and the very real feeling that the Empire doesn't see this as the end of a climb.

Just another step.

WrestleZone Championship

Segment

The screen fades to black.

A low drum begins to pulse.

Not fast.

Not dramatic.

Measured.

Like a heartbeat.

Then another sound joins it.

A gong.

Then the heavy crack of boots on concrete.

White smoke rolls across the screen.

A red bandana flutters in the dark.

A title belt glints.

The music swells.

John Phillips: "Still to come tonight... Hakuryu challenges Gunnar Van Patton for the WrestleZone Championship."

Mark Bravo: "And this did not come together because of respect. This came together because two dangerous men looked at each other... and saw a war worth starting."

The screen flashes to that first silent backstage encounter.

Hakuryu, the Fighting Champion, walking with Sinja.

Gunnar Van Patton, already the WrestleZone Champion, leaning against the wall ahead.

No words.

Just a stare.

A smirk from Gunnar.

A tightening jaw from Hakuryu.

John Phillips: "Before contracts were signed... before challenges were made... the tension was already there."

Mark Bravo: "That's the kind of moment you don't forget. One champion passing another in a hallway, and both of 'em knowing someday they were gonna have to test it."

The package shifts into Hakuryu's rise.

Shots of him in prayer.

Shots of Sinja at his side.

Shots of opponents being broken down piece by piece.

Superkicks. Tornado kicks. The Koya Otoshi. The Nenbutsu Bomb. The diving headbutt. The Curse of the Dragon.

One defense.

Then another.

Then another.

And another.

And another.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu did what the Fighting Championship was built to demand. He defended. Again and again. Five successful defenses. Five statements."

Mark Bravo: "And the whole time he was calm about it. Too calm. Like every fight was just another prayer answered with violence."

The screen cuts to the contract table.

Three clipboards beneath the spotlight.

The UTA World Championship.

The WrestleZone Championship.

The Tag Team Championships.

Hakuryu stepping toward them.

John Phillips: "Those five defenses earned Hakuryu the right to challenge any champion in UTA at Victorious."

Mark Bravo: "And the minute that happened, everybody started wondering the same thing. Which title? Which champion? Which poor bastard gets picked?"

Hakuryu dismisses the tag title contract without hesitation.

He lingers at the UTA World Championship.

He calls Chris Ross no warrior.

Nothing but barbarism.

Then he turns away from that too.

Now the camera tightens on the WrestleZone Championship contract.

Hakuryu's hand hovering above Gunnar Van Patton's name.

John Phillips: "And then he made his choice."

Mark Bravo: "Not just a challenger's choice. A provocation."

Hakuryu's words hit over the footage.

He will break the symbol of America.

America is weak. Ugly. Worthless.

Defeating Gunnar Van Patton will prove Japan's superiority once and for all.

The red seal hits the contract.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu didn't just choose Gunnar Van Patton. He chose everything Gunnar represents."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. The White Dragon didn't just ask for a title match. He declared war on a symbol. On a man. On a whole damn idea."

The package cuts backstage.

Gunnar Van Patton watching the monitor.

Leg braced.

Head wrapped.

Still every inch the champion.

Around him, the Unholy Wolf Brigade.

Avril Selene Kinkade icy and composed.

Arkady restless.

Torunn cold.

Theron silent.

John Phillips: "And Gunnar Van Patton did not walk into this road at full strength."

Mark Bravo: "No. Not even close. The Fatu Twins left their mark. The damage was real. The head wound was real. The brace was real. The target on his back? Even more real."

Quick flashes now.

Gunnar on crutches.

Gunnar demanding Avril fix another corrupt situation.

Gunnar snarling that he ain't dead yet.

Arkady defending the WrestleZone Championship on Gunnar's behalf in the chaos of injury and politics.

The Unholy Wolf Brigade surviving, adapting, clawing through every new attempt to weaken them.

John Phillips: "The road to Victorious was not smooth for Gunnar Van Patton. Injury. ambushes. legal maneuvering. enemies closing from every side."

Mark Bravo: "That's what makes this match so dangerous. Hakuryu didn't pick Gunnar at his healthiest. He picked him wounded. He picked him while people were already trying to tear pieces off the champ."

The package slams forward to the in-ring confrontation from the contract choice night.

Gunnar rising from his seat.

Cold stare locked on the screen.

The Wolves around him.

The sense that something inevitable just got set in motion.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu made the challenge official."

Mark Bravo: "And Gunnar didn't blink."

The music grows darker.

Now we see the next escalation.

Arkady Bogatyr versus Hakuryu.

Chaos against meditation.

Arkady flying through the crowd, through the ropes, through every angle he can invent.

Hakuryu surviving it.

Learning it.

Beating it.

John Phillips: "The collision did not stay theoretical. Before Victorious, Hakuryu and the Wolves were already finding each other through proxies and pressure."

Mark Bravo: "That Arkady match mattered. Hakuryu proved he could survive the chaos orbiting Gunnar. He proved he could absorb madness and still keep his own shape."

The screen cuts hard to the backstage riot.

Theron Tkachuk trying to break loose.

Torunn crushing Sinja across the production box.

Security failing.

Hakuryu standing there in prayer, untouched, bored, superior.

John Phillips: "And then came the explosion."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. Because once Hakuryu and Gunnar's world truly touched... everybody around them started

catching fire."

Gunnar storms into frame through the chaos.

Brace clacking.

Head wrapped.

Still commanding the room like the alpha of something feral and loyal and dangerous.

He stops Theron.

He stops Torunn.

He positions himself between his Wolves and Hakuryu.

John Phillips: "Injury or not, Gunnar Van Patton walked into that riot and pulled the Wolves back from the edge himself."

Mark Bravo: "That's leadership. Ugly leadership, sure. But real. He walked into a battlefield half-broken and still became the most dangerous man in the hallway."

Then Hakuryu speaks.

The insult.

The challenge.

Call them dogs again.

You're next.

Broken? Find out for yourself.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu called out Gunnar directly."

Mark Bravo: "And Gunnar answered like a man who doesn't care what body part still works and what body part doesn't. He wanted the fight right there."

The package shows Scott Stevens stepping into the chaos.

Shouting that he knew this would happen.

Barring Theron and Torunn from Victorious.

Trying to strip away the Wolves around Gunnar.

John Phillips: "And then one more layer got added. Scott Stevens made sure Theron Tkachuk and Torunn Sigurjonsson would not be at Victorious."

Mark Bravo: "Which means tonight, for all the hatred, all the history, all the factions and all the wolves and all the rituals... when the bell rings, this gets boiled down real simple."

The music drops lower.

Hakuryu in prayer.

Gunnar adjusting the brace.

Sinja clutching his staff.

Avril watching with that unreadable calm.

The WrestleZone Championship.

The Fighting Championship.

The contract.

The riot.

The stare.

The challenge.

The war.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu earned this opportunity through five successful Fighting Championship defenses."

Mark Bravo: "And then he pointed it right at Gunnar Van Patton, not because it was easy... but because it was the one fight that could mean the most."

John Phillips: "Hakuryu wants to prove superiority."

Mark Bravo: "Gunnar wants to prove that one eye, one bad leg, and a body held together by hate is still enough to stomp a hole in a holy man."

The final montage begins.

Hakuryu's calm face beneath the brim of the hat.

Gunnar's one visible eye staring through the pain.

The contract stamp hitting the page.

The brace locking into place.

Sinja translating the threat.

Avril's cold stare.

Security trying to hold the world together.

And then one final split-screen.

Hakuryu on one side.

Gunnar Van Patton on the other.

The WrestleZone Championship between them.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu versus Gunnar Van Patton."

Mark Bravo: "Meditation versus mutilation."

John Phillips: "Calm versus carnage."

Mark Bravo: "And the WrestleZone Championship in the middle of it all."

WRESTLEZONE CHAMPIONSHIP

HAKURYU vs. GUNNAR VAN PATTON

NEXT

The package fades to black.

Hakuryu vs. Gunnar Van Patton

Match

The arena goes black.

Not dim.

Not lowered.

Black.

Total and immediate, as though someone has thrown a shroud over the entire CHI Health Center and smothered every last trace of light in the building.

John Phillips: "Oh..."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. Here we go."

There is no music at first.

No movement.

No rush.

Only silence.

Then the first gong strikes.

It rolls through the darkness low and heavy, ancient and ominous, the kind of sound that doesn't just echo through an arena—it settles in people's bones.

And when it fades, complete silence follows it.

Then the second gong.

Another lonely white spotlight appears down the ramp, isolated and cold, like a lantern being lit on a road no one should be walking alone.

Silence again.

Then the third.

A third white beam cuts into the darkness, completing the path.

The crowd begins to boo, but even the boos sound smaller than the atmosphere gathering around the stage.

John Phillips: "This doesn't feel like an entrance."

Mark Bravo: "No. This feels like the beginning of a ceremony."

Then the chants begin.

Low.

Spiritual.

Unnerving.

White smoke starts pouring over the stage and down the ramp, swallowing the floor in a rolling haze that makes the whole path to the ring feel unreal.

From that smoke come six women, three to each side, dressed in elaborate Kabuki-style outfits tailored in Hakuryu's colors. They move with graceful symmetry, each one taking her place along the ramp in perfect spacing, as though they have rehearsed this ritual a hundred times before tonight.

John Phillips: "Look at this scene."

Mark Bravo: "And every bit of it is intentional. Hakuryu doesn't just walk to the ring. He creates a world around himself

first."

The chants deepen.

Sinja emerges first.

Full pilgrimage attire. White robes. Facepaint stark beneath the white lights. Shakujo staff in hand. Head bowed. Eyes downcast. He reaches the edge of the ramp and stops dead, utterly still, never once acknowledging the crowd around him.

John Phillips: "Sinja out first, as always. The disciple. The translator. The keeper of Hakuryu's ritual."

Mark Bravo: "And even standing there doing nothing, he somehow makes this feel even weirder."

Then Hakuryu appears.

The White Dragon steps through the smoke with his head bowed beneath the brim of the hat, every inch of him composed and deliberate. The shakujo staff clicks against the ramp with each measured step, the sound sharp and distinct beneath the chants.

He does not react to the boos.

He does not look at the people.

He does not care they exist.

He simply walks.

Slowly.

Calmly.

Like he has already been here before, like he has already seen the outcome, like the match is just the final obligation before prophecy becomes fact.

John Phillips: "The White Dragon has arrived."

Mark Bravo: "And listen to this place. They are booing him, but they're watching every single step."

As Hakuryu passes them, the women bow deeply in unison.

Then, as one, they toss lotus blossoms into the air.

White petals drift through the smoke, floating around Hakuryu as he moves past them in perfect, unbroken rhythm.

The image is ethereal.

Untouchable.

More like an omen than a man making his way to a wrestling ring.

John Phillips: "What a visual."

Mark Bravo: "That's the point. Hakuryu wants you to feel like the fight starts in his world, not yours."

He reaches ringside and pauses.

Sinja climbs the steps first and opens the ropes with ceremonial precision.

Hakuryu remains on the floor for one more moment, lifting one hand into prayer formation and murmuring something that cannot be heard over the chants. Then he ascends the steps and enters the ring without hurry, without wasted motion, without breaking the spell he has wrapped around the building.

Once inside, Hakuryu walks to the center of the ring and stops.

Sinja stands ready.

Hakuryu removes his garments with deliberate slowness, piece by piece, handing each one individually to Sinja without ever looking at him. The hat. The outer robe. The ceremonial layers. Each item passed off like a sacred object being returned to its place.

John Phillips: "Everything about him is controlled."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. He's not moving fast because he doesn't believe he has to. In Hakuryu's mind, everybody else can wait."

The crowd boos harder now, trying to break through the atmosphere, trying to force some reaction out of him. Hakuryu gives them nothing.

He turns toward his corner.

Then kneels.

Eyes closed.

Hands together.

Full stillness.

And nothing happens.

No pacing from the referee.

No words from Sinja.

No movement in the ring at all.

The camera simply lingers on Hakuryu in prayer as the chants continue to echo and the lotus blossoms settle against the ropes and canvas.

John Phillips: "Look at this."

Mark Bravo: "He's making the whole arena sit in his silence. That's power."

Five seconds pass.

Ten.

Fifteen.

Twenty.

Hakuryu never moves.

The message is unmistakable.

Before Gunnar Van Patton ever walks out...

Before the bell ever rings...

Before the first blow is ever thrown...

Hakuryu has already tried to seize control of the match.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu is in complete command of the moment."

Mark Bravo: "That's exactly what this is supposed to be. Not an entrance. A warning."

The chants continue as the camera lingers on the White Dragon kneeling in stillness, untouched by the noise, untouched by the crowd, already making Victorious feel like it belongs to him.

Hakuryu remains kneeling in his corner, eyes closed, hands together, the last of the chants still hanging in the building like smoke after a fire. The lotus blossoms have settled. Sinja stands at ringside with Hakuryu's garments folded over one arm.

Then the entire mood of the arena is ripped apart.

"Boots and Blood" hits violently.

Not a swell.

Not a gradual interruption.

A detonation.

The guitar screams through the arena and the crowd erupts, expecting the usual predator to storm through the curtain and slice straight through the atmosphere Hakuryu just built.

John Phillips: "And here comes the champion!"

Mark Bravo: "Here comes chaos."

But when Gunnar Van Patton steps out, the reaction changes.

Not silence.

Not quite.

Confusion.

Concern.

The crowd expected the usual Gunnar: intense, predatory, all forward motion and violence. Instead, what they see is a man visibly struggling just to make the walk.

John Phillips: "Oh no..."

Gunnar hobbles onto the stage, heavily favoring the right leg.

The orthopedic brace is impossible to miss.

Massive.

Bulky.

The kind of brace worn after surgery, not after a bad week. It wraps the knee and lower leg in an unmistakable shell of black support and exposed metal, instantly changing the way everyone looks at this match.

Mark Bravo: "That ain't a wrap. That ain't a sleeve. That is the real-deal, post-surgery-looking kind of brace."

John Phillips: "Gunnar Van Patton has been out of action since No Love Lost, and this is his first match back. He does not look anywhere near one hundred percent."

Gunnar takes another step.

Then another.

Each one slower than it should be.

Each one tested first before fully committed to, as though he has to make sure the leg is still willing to hold his weight before trusting it again.

And he is not alone.

Avril Selene Kinkade follows several steps behind him.

That alone changes the feeling even more.

Avril is not the kind of presence you expect at ringside for Gunnar. She handles his affairs in the shadows, backstage, in contracts and corridors and consequences. She does not walk him to the ring.

But tonight she does.

John Phillips: "And look who's with him. Avril Selene Kinkade at ringside."

Mark Bravo: "That's a rare sight, and to me that says something's really wrong. No Arkady. No Torunn. No Theron. Just Gunnar and the lawyer."

John Phillips: "The Unholy Wolf Brigade is not here tonight. Arkady Bogatyr is still dealing with the severe arm injury from his battle with Hakuryu two weeks ago, and Torunn Sigurjonsson and Theron Tkachuk were banned from the arena by General Manager Scott Stevens."

Mark Bravo: "So now the champion's walking in hurt, his Wolves aren't here, and the one person with him is the woman who usually never needs to be seen in public. That is bad."

Gunnar keeps moving.

Slowly.

Carefully.

Completely committed to the injury.

He grimaces once as he tests the right leg harder than before, then compensates and pushes forward. No sprint. No low slide. No front handspring into the ring. Nothing about this resembles the usual cold and fluid Gunnar Van Patton entrance.

It looks like survival.

John Phillips: "This is hard to watch."

Mark Bravo: "And in the ring, I promise you, Hakuryu sees every single bit of it."

The camera cuts to the White Dragon.

Hakuryu is no longer kneeling.

He stands in his corner now, calm as ever, but there is a visible change in the posture. The shoulders are looser. The stillness less ceremonial and more confident. The eyes stay fixed on the brace.

He says nothing.

He does not need to.

His body already says it:

This is not the champion he expected to have to kill.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu's posture just changed."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. He looks like a man who thinks Christmas came early."

Gunnar reaches ringside and pauses with one hand on the apron, the other briefly pressing against the brace as he steadies himself. Avril moves to the steps and remains close enough to be useful, but never fussy, never frantic, never

emotional. She watches the ring. Watches Hakuryu. Watches the geometry of the whole thing.

Gunnar hops up the steel steps on the one good leg.

It is controlled, but ugly.

He avoids putting full force on the right side until he has no choice, and even then the movement is guarded and deliberate.

Avril reaches the apron and holds the ropes open for him.

John Phillips: "Avril opening the ropes for Gunnar. That is not normal."

Mark Bravo: "No, and when stuff stops being normal around Gunnar Van Patton, it usually means somebody should be worried. Usually him least of all. But tonight? Maybe not."

Gunnar steps through the ropes carefully and enters the ring without any flourish, keeping the weight off the damaged leg as long as possible. He straightens slowly once he is inside, turning toward center ring with a grimace he cannot fully hide.

The referee moves in immediately, concern obvious, arms out, trying to assess whether the WrestleZone Champion is even fit to compete.

Referee: "Gunnar, let me check that knee—"

Gunnar physically shoves him aside.

Gunnar Van Patton: "Fuck off."

Mark Bravo: "Well... there's the medical update."

John Phillips: "Gunnar making it very clear he has no interest in being checked, helped, or protected."

He reaches up and removes the trucker cap first, tossing it aside. Then the black t-shirt comes off, peeled away with a rough pull over the head. The body beneath it is still carved from violence and discipline, still scarred, still dangerous, but the way he stands makes all of that feel secondary to the damage hanging from the right leg.

At ringside, Avril lowers the ropes and steps back into her place.

Arms crossed.

Expression unreadable.

And her eyes are not on Gunnar.

They are on Hakuryu.

Cold.

Evaluating.

Watching him, not with fear, not with panic, but with the detached intelligence of a woman measuring a threat and already calculating how it will have to be handled.

John Phillips: "Look where Avril's attention is."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. She's not looking at Gunnar. She's looking at Hakuryu. Like she's studying him."

Across the ring, Hakuryu stares back with a calm that now borders on predatory comfort. The White Dragon's confidence continues to rise the longer he watches Gunnar shift the leg, test the brace, and favor the right side.

And as far as Hakuryu is concerned, he may already have won before the bell ever rings.

The bell has not rung yet.

But the fight has already started.

Hakuryu steps out of his corner first, slowly, with the kind of cold confidence that only grows when a hunter believes the animal in front of him is already limping. His breathing is measured. His face unreadable. His eyes locked on Gunnar Van Patton's right leg.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu is wasting no time."

Mark Bravo: "No, because in his mind, he's looking at weakness. He's looking at a broken champion."

Across from him, Gunnar stands with his shoulders squared, but the damage appears obvious. The massive brace is still strapped on. His weight leans subtly away from the right side. His jaw is tight. One hand flexes open and closed like he's trying to keep the pain from becoming visible anywhere else.

Hakuryu stops just in front of him.

Not nose to nose.

Not yet.

Just close enough that the threat feels private.

Intimate.

Designed only for Gunnar to hear.

Hakuryu: ?????????????????? (And with that leg, you still dare call yourself champion.)

Gunnar says nothing.

He doesn't need Sinja for the meaning. He understands every word, and the look in his one visible eye says as much.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu speaking directly to Gunnar in Japanese."

Mark Bravo: "And that's not for show. Gunnar understands him. Every insult is landing exactly where Hakuryu wants it to."

Hakuryu lowers his gaze to the brace and, with almost casual contempt, snaps a light kick into the outside of the damaged leg.

It is not a real strike.

Not yet.

It is a test.

A touch.

An insult wrapped in contact.

Gunnar flinches immediately, the right leg jerking inward as his body shifts off it on instinct. His mouth tightens. His shoulders tense. He doesn't step back, but the reaction is there.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu testing the leg."

Mark Bravo: "And Gunnar definitely felt that."

Hakuryu's posture loosens.

It is subtle.

But it is there.

The White Dragon has seen enough to believe what he wants to believe.

He steps in closer now and fires another kick at the brace, harder this time, the sound of shin against metal and support echoing in the quiet between them.

Gunnar winces and shifts again, one hand briefly dropping toward the knee before he forces it back to his side. He holds his ground, but the discomfort is obvious.

Hakuryu: ?????? (Fragile.)

John Phillips: "Hakuryu is getting bolder with every second."

Mark Bravo: "Why wouldn't he? He just kicked the thing twice and Gunnar's giving him exactly the kind of reaction he wants."

Hakuryu circles half a step, drawing even closer, his chest almost brushing Gunnar's as he stares up into the champion's face. There is no rush in him now. No urgency. Just cold certainty.

He lifts his foot again and drives a third kick into the brace, sharp and mean, no longer probing but punishing.

Gunnar exhales through clenched teeth and adjusts his footing, the bad leg bending slightly beneath him before he catches himself and re-centers with visible effort.

John Phillips: "That one had more behind it."

Mark Bravo: "And Gunnar's still standing, but you can see he hates every bit of this."

Hakuryu leans in just enough that his next words feel less like trash talk and more like a verdict.

Hakuryu: ?????????????????? (A broken beast should not stand before me.)

Gunnar's nostrils flare. His shoulders twitch once. The urge to fire back is there, plain as daylight, but he keeps it leashed. He only stares at Hakuryu, jaw grinding, letting the words soak into the air between them.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu is treating Gunnar like the match has already been decided."

Mark Bravo: "That's the whole point. He's trying to talk to Gunnar like a man already halfway in the grave."

The White Dragon takes one final step forward, fully entering Gunnar's space now, and speaks one last time with all the icy authority of a man convinced that the outcome is already written.

Hakuryu: ?????????????????? (You are already finished.)

Then Hakuryu does something even crueler than the words.

He turns his back slightly.

Not all the way.

Just enough.

A calculated insult.

A dismissal.

The body language of a man saying: I have seen all I need to see.

John Phillips: "That is blatant disrespect."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, that's Hakuryu telling Gunnar he doesn't even consider him a full threat right now."

And in that one motion, the trap is baited perfectly.

Hakuryu believes Gunnar is already broken.

His confidence rises.

His caution drops.

And the next thing he does will come from arrogance, not patience.

Hakuryu's slight turn of the back hangs in the air for one more heartbeat.

Just enough disrespect.

Just enough arrogance.

Just enough invitation.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu is absolutely convinced he's in control."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and that's when people get careless."

The White Dragon pivots sharply back toward Gunnar Van Patton and this time there is nothing light or dismissive about the kick he throws.

No probe.

No insult.

No test.

This is a real strike.

Full velocity.

Full commitment.

Aimed directly at the damaged right knee, meant to blow the joint apart before the bell has even truly given this match shape.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu going right for the kill!"

Gunnar catches it.

Clean.

Instant.

Perfect timing.

And for one single beat, the entire arena goes dead silent.

Not because they are quiet.

Because the moment is too sudden to process.

Hakuryu's leg is trapped in Gunnar's hand.

Hakuryu's head snaps up.

And the calm on his face fractures.

Mark Bravo: "Uh oh."

John Phillips: "WAIT A SECOND—"

Still holding the captured leg, Gunnar explodes forward and whips the supposedly injured right leg upward in a brutal roundhouse.

The kick slams into Hakuryu's chest with a crack that echoes through the building.

The White Dragon is blasted flat onto his back.

Now the crowd erupts.

John Phillips: "HE CAUGHT HIM!"

Mark Bravo: "THE LEG! THE LEG! OH MY GOD!"

Hakuryu skids across the canvas and sits up just enough to try to understand what just happened, but Gunnar gives him no time to solve it. The champion stands over him, looming, breathing steady, not limping, not favoring anything.

Then Gunnar reaches down and grabs the brace.

With one violent motion, he tears it off.

He holds it up for the whole building to see.

Then throws it aside.

John Phillips: "It was never real!"

Mark Bravo: "HE WAS FAKING THE WHOLE DAMN THING!"

The CHI Health Center comes unglued.

The boos for Hakuryu turn instantly into a roar for the reveal, a wave of shock and adrenaline crashing over the whole arena as the truth lands all at once.

Hakuryu sits up on the mat and stares.

Actually stares.

The first genuine crack in his composure all night is right there on his face, and because it almost never happens, it lands like a hammer. Not fear. Not panic.

Shock.

Pure, undeniable shock.

John Phillips: "Look at Hakuryu! He cannot believe it!"

Mark Bravo: "Because he thought he had this solved before the first real exchange!"

At ringside, Sinja grips the apron rope so tightly his knuckles go white beneath the paint. The disciple's head lifts for the first time in real alarm, his whole posture rattled by what he's just seen.

John Phillips: "Sinja is stunned!"

Gunnar rolls his neck once.

Then cracks his knuckles.

No limp.

No hesitation.

No weakness.

He was never hurt.

He was never vulnerable.

He was hunting.

Mark Bravo: "That's evil. That is absolutely evil. He let Hakuryu believe every second of it."

Now Gunnar stands fully upright in the middle of the ring, body language completely transformed. No longer surviving. No longer compromised. He is healthy, dangerous, and very much in control.

He stares down at Hakuryu, one eye burning with contempt, then raises his hand and gives the White Dragon the middle finger.

John Phillips: "And now Gunnar Van Patton lets him know exactly what he thinks of him."

Mark Bravo: "Hakuryu wanted a broken champion. What he got instead was a trap."

The match has reset.

But not to even ground.

Hakuryu's confidence is shattered.

Gunnar's is surging.

And for the first time tonight, the White Dragon looks like a man who has just realized he may be the one standing in front of the wrong monster.

Hakuryu rises from the mat with care now, but not hesitation.

The shock is still there, hidden badly beneath the mask he is trying to rebuild, yet he still steps forward to meet Gunnar Van Patton in the center of the ring. There is no backing away. No stalling. Just the White Dragon trying to reclaim his shape before the champion crushes it completely.

John Phillips: "To Hakuryu's credit, he's still stepping right into the fire."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, but now he's stepping into it without the comfort of thinking Gunnar's half-dead."

They meet in the middle.

Muay Thai versus Karate.

Violence versus ritual.

Gunnar wastes no time turning the exchange into his kind of fight. Hakuryu fires first with a sharp kick toward the ribs, but Gunnar checks it clean on the shin and answers immediately with a brutal roundhouse to the chest.

The sound echoes.

Hakuryu buckles.

John Phillips: "God, what a kick!"

Mark Bravo: "That ain't a point-scoring strike. That's a punishment."

Hakuryu tries to reset and bring his guard back up, but Gunnar is already pressing into him again. Another roundhouse to the chest. Hakuryu folds backward a step, air forced out of him. He tries to answer with a quick straight kick up the middle and Gunnar bats it aside like he saw it coming three seconds before it happened.

Gunnar Van Patton: "Too slow."

He slams another kick into Hakuryu's chest.

The White Dragon doubles over again.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu cannot absorb those without consequence!"

Mark Bravo: "And he shouldn't. Nobody should. Gunnar's chest kicks look like they oughta come with a police report."

Hakuryu backs up, trying to establish range, trying to find the tempo that usually lets him dictate exchanges, but Gunnar keeps walking him down. No wasted movement. No reckless charge. Just cold, relentless pressure. Hakuryu throws a backfist. Gunnar blocks it on the forearm. Hakuryu tries a low kick. Gunnar checks it. Hakuryu snaps a quick superkick up the middle—Gunnar catches enough of it on the shoulder and steps through the angle before Hakuryu can build off it.

John Phillips: "Gunnar is defending everything right now!"

Hakuryu finally commits to a roundhouse, trying to put full force behind something and reclaim a little respect in the exchange.

Gunnar catches it.

Not just with the hands.

With his whole body understanding the motion.

He traps the leg, turns his hips, and dumps Hakuryu on his head with a brutal capture suplex that spikes the challenger hard enough to send him rolling toward the ropes.

John Phillips: "Capture suplex!"

Mark Bravo: "That was nasty. Gunnar read the kick, caught it, and dumped him like a guy who's been waiting all week to prove a point."

Hakuryu reaches the corner and tries to use it as shelter. Not to hide. To reset. He gets one foot under him, then the other, and finally brings his hands together in prayer stance, eyes narrowing, breathing trying to slow again.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu trying to re-center."

Mark Bravo: "He needs that ritual. He needs that moment."

Gunnar walks straight into it.

No hesitation.

No reverence.

He slaps both of Hakuryu's hands apart with open contempt.

Gunnar Van Patton: "Knock that shit off."

The crowd erupts.

John Phillips: "He just swatted the prayer away!"

Mark Bravo: "That's disrespect on a spiritual level right there!"

At ringside, Sinja loses his composure immediately, shouting in Japanese and stepping toward the apron before catching himself. His hands grip the rope tight, the perfect disciple's calm finally broken by what he just watched.

In the ring, Hakuryu fires a punch out of anger more than strategy.

Gunnar catches that too.

He traps the wrist, yanks Hakuryu off-line, and spins him over with a martial arts style arm drag. But he never lets go of the wrist. Hakuryu hits the mat and Gunnar keeps the arm trapped as he slides through and spikes him with a Devlin

Slide, driving him hard into the canvas.

John Phillips: "What a transition!"

Mark Bravo: "That's ring IQ. That's film-room violence. Gunnar turned one angry punch into a whole lesson."

Hakuryu spills onto his back, chest heaving, neck and shoulder both jarred from the chain of impact. Gunnar rises over him, jaw clenched, and looks down like he can't decide whether he's insulted or entertained.

Gunnar Van Patton: "That all ya got, holy man?"

He drops into a cover, but it is lazy. Cocky. One forearm across the chest, body barely committed, the whole pin less about ending the match than rubbing Gunnar's dominance in Hakuryu's face.

Referee: "One! Two!"

Hakuryu kicks out.

John Phillips: "Only two."

Mark Bravo: "That wasn't a real attempt to win. That was Gunnar saying, 'I can pin you whenever I feel like getting serious.'"

Gunnar gets up and stays over him immediately, not allowing a breath, not allowing the challenger room to pray, think, or rebuild anything. Hakuryu rolls toward a knee and Gunnar clubs him across the upper back. Hakuryu tries to stand and Gunnar drills another Muay Thai roundhouse into the chest.

Hakuryu buckles again.

John Phillips: "He keeps going back to the chest!"

Mark Bravo: "Because it's working. Every one of those kicks is making Hakuryu smaller."

Avril Selene Kinkade watches from ringside with her arms crossed and her expression perfectly neutral. She shows no relief. No smile. No pride. Just cold, clinical evaluation, eyes moving from strike to reaction, from Gunnar's timing to Hakuryu's failures, studying everything like a woman recording details for later use.

John Phillips: "And look at Avril. Not celebrating. Not panicking. Just watching."

Mark Bravo: "Exactly. She's not here to cheerlead. She's here to evaluate."

Hakuryu swings again, this time a quick backfist meant to interrupt the pressure. Gunnar blocks it, steps inside, and drives a hard knee into the body. Hakuryu folds. Gunnar answers with another chest kick, this one sending the White Dragon all the way into the ropes.

Gunnar Van Patton: "C'mon. Pray harder."

The champion keeps stalking, shoulders loose, breathing controlled, one eye full of contempt. Hakuryu is still dangerous, still trying to time a response, but Gunnar's violence and pressure are stripping the ritual away one ugly second at a time.

John Phillips: "This is total early domination by Gunnar Van Patton."

Mark Bravo: "And it matters, because if Hakuryu comes back from this later, it's gonna mean something. Right now? He is getting walked down, broken up, and embarrassed."

Hakuryu does not move immediately after the kick.

That matters.

Gunnar Van Patton is on the mat clutching the right knee, face twisted, the entire arena still reacting to the horrible

sound of bone, brace, and force meeting in exactly the wrong way. A lesser man might have pounced. A hungrier man might have sprinted.

Hakuryu simply stands in the middle of the ring and prays.

Only for a moment.

Just long enough to pull the match out of chaos and back into the place where he is strongest.

Back into silence.

Back into ritual.

Back into his rhythm.

John Phillips: "Look at him."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. That little prayer right there wasn't for God. That was Hakuryu putting the whole fight back on his terms."

When he opens his eyes again, there is no panic left in them.

No frustration.

No need to improvise.

He has found the weakness, and now the White Dragon becomes what he always becomes once the opening is identified:

Deliberate.

Brutal.

Surgical.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu has reclaimed his rhythm."

Mark Bravo: "And that is terrible news for Gunnar, because from here on out this ain't a fight. This is dissection."

Hakuryu closes the distance without urgency, every step measured, every breath calm. Gunnar is still trying to drag himself toward the ropes, still trying to stand through pride and instinct alone, but Hakuryu gets to him before the champion can find any real base.

He doesn't stomp Gunnar.

He doesn't throw wild strikes.

He simply reaches down, seizes the damaged leg, and yanks Gunnar backward away from the ropes like a man pulling a body into proper position before the next cut.

John Phillips: "Every bit of Hakuryu's focus is on that right knee now."

Mark Bravo: "Because he learned the lesson. The chest kicks, the suplexes, the pressure—all of that belonged to Gunnar. This? This belongs to Hakuryu."

Gunnar throws a forearm from the mat, then another, trying to create space, but Hakuryu barely registers them. He drags the champion toward the corner and steps through the ropes to the floor, never taking his eyes off the leg as he goes.

The crowd rises, sensing something ugly coming.

John Phillips: "What is Hakuryu doing here?"

From the floor, Hakuryu pulls Gunnar's body into place so that the steel ring post sits between the champion's legs. Gunnar realizes what's happening too late and starts clawing for the ropes, trying to turn his body away before the angle is fully set.

Hakuryu grips the ankle and slams the damaged leg into the post.

Once.

The arena groans.

Twice.

Louder this time.

Three times.

The sound is sickening.

John Phillips: "No! No!"

Mark Bravo: "He is trying to shatter that knee!"

Gunnar snarls and reaches down toward Hakuryu, but the angle is all wrong. The post traps him. The pain keeps him half-flat. Hakuryu never hurries. He never wastes a movement. He simply threads the leg around the steel and falls backward into a figure-four leglock around the ring post.

John Phillips: "Figure four around the post!"

Mark Bravo: "That is disgusting! Absolutely disgusting!"

The referee begins the count instantly, leaning through the ropes and shouting at Hakuryu to break it. Gunnar's body convulses under the torque, hands slapping at the apron and the bottom rope, face contorted as the pressure attacks the already-damaged knee from every possible direction.

Referee: "One! Two! Three! Four!"

Hakuryu releases at the last possible instant.

Not at four.

At four and everything.

The hold breaks only when disqualification is practically already breathing on his neck.

John Phillips: "He held it until the absolute edge!"

Mark Bravo: "That's who he is. Hakuryu doesn't break rules because he loses control. He tests exactly how much of your body he can take before the law steps in."

He slides back into the ring with the same cold composure he had when he left it.

Gunnar is dragging himself inward, one hand on the ropes, the other on the knee, trying to pull himself upright through pure anger and diminishing returns. He gets one foot under him.

Then both.

For half a second, he's vertical.

Hakuryu immediately smashes the damaged leg with a low kick.

Gunnar buckles.

John Phillips: "Every time he gets up, Hakuryu cuts him back down!"

Gunnar tries again, teeth clenched, shoulder against the ropes. Hakuryu lets him get just enough height to believe in it, then snaps another low kick into the same knee.

Again Gunnar drops.

Mark Bravo: "This is methodical. He's not just hurting the leg. He's teaching Gunnar that trying to stand is a mistake."

The White Dragon gives him one more chance to rise.

One more false bit of hope.

Then another low kick, sharp and brutal, clips the same right knee and sends Gunnar stumbling down to both hands again.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu has slowed this match to a crawl, and that is exactly where he wants it."

Now he steps in behind Gunnar and grabs the leg again.

One smooth motion.

A twist.

And Gunnar is yanked over with a dragon screw leg whip, his body flipping sideways as the knee is torqued with malicious precision.

John Phillips: "Dragon screw leg whip!"

Mark Bravo: "And he rolled right through it! He's not done!"

Hakuryu never lets go of the leg. He flows from the dragon screw straight into a Nagata Lock I, trapping the damaged knee in a reverse figure-four variation that bends the joint the wrong way and leaves Gunnar writhing on the mat in immediate agony.

John Phillips: "Nagata Lock !! Hakuryu has the knee trapped!"

Mark Bravo: "That leg is not supposed to turn like that!"

Gunnar slams a fist into the mat, not to submit, but because the pain has become too immediate for anything else. His free leg kicks at the canvas. His hands grab for Hakuryu's wrist and ankle, trying to pry apart the geometry of the hold with raw strength. Hakuryu remains perfectly composed above him, face untouched by urgency, body arranged with the cruel efficiency of a craftsman.

Hakuryu: ?????????? (Will you still try to stand?)

Gunnar growls through his teeth and starts forcing separation one inch at a time. It is ugly. It is slow. It is nothing but anger and upper-body power dragging against clean leverage. Eventually he pries enough space to roll his hips and break the hold, but by the time he gets loose, the damage has already been done.

John Phillips: "Gunnar escaped, but not without a cost."

He claws his way back to one knee, then another, trying once more to find his feet. The crowd is trying to will him up now. Trying to pull him back into the fight with sheer volume.

Hakuryu lets him rise just enough.

Then spins and drives a spinning solebutt into Gunnar's jaw.

The champion's head snaps back and his body freezes upright for just a beat, stunned but not yet fallen.

Mark Bravo: "Ohhh, he caught him clean!"

Hakuryu does not waste the window.

Prayer hands.

One breath.

Then he hooks Gunnar and drives him down with the Nenbutsu Bomb, the sitout powerbomb landing flush and violent enough to shake the whole ring.

John Phillips: "Nenbutsu Bomb!"

Mark Bravo: "That might do it!"

Hakuryu folds over into the cover.

Referee: "One! Two!"

Gunnar kicks out.

John Phillips: "No! Only two!"

Mark Bravo: "And now we know something important. The leg may be breaking, but the man attached to it ain't done yet."

Hakuryu rises from the pin without complaint and without panic. He simply stands over Gunnar again, breathing slow, rhythm restored, the cold serenity still intact. He has not ended the match.

But he has changed it completely.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu found the weakness, and now he is torturing it."

Mark Bravo: "That's exactly the right word. Torture. Slow. Ritualistic. Surgical. Gunnar's not in a fight right now. He's on the table."

Hakuryu stands over Gunnar Van Patton with the kind of stillness that only comes when a man believes the ending has finally arrived. The White Dragon has the pace. He has the knee. He has the ritual. Gunnar is still down, still dragging that right leg behind him, still trying to rise through damage that should have buried him already.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu has Gunnar exactly where he wants him."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and that is the dangerous thing. Once Hakuryu decides the moment is right, he doesn't ask questions. He just ends people."

The challenger turns toward the corner and begins to climb.

Not rushed.

Not excited.

Measured.

Ceremonial.

Every step up the ropes feels like part of the same prayer he has been forcing over the whole match since he found Gunnar's leg. He reaches the top and turns slowly, looking down at the champion laid out beneath him.

Then the hands come together.

Prayer.

Breath.

Ryu no Kokyu.

John Phillips: "Breath of the Dragon! If this lands, it may be over!"

Hakuryu launches with the diving headbutt.

Gunnar rolls.

At the very last second, he drags his body just far enough out of the lane, and Hakuryu drives forehead and chest into the canvas with a sickening crash.

John Phillips: "Nobody home!"

Mark Bravo: "That hurts every inch of you! Chest, ribs, neck, skull—all of it!"

Hakuryu bounces off the impact and instinctively reaches toward the mat to push himself up. Gunnar is already moving too, slower, angrier, fueled by desperation more than stability. The champion gets to a knee first, then a foot, then both, using the ropes only for a second before forcing himself away from them.

Hakuryu comes at him with a knife-edge chop, trying to reclaim the initiative before Gunnar can set himself.

Gunnar bobs under it.

And explodes.

John Phillips: "Gunnar slipped it!"

Left to the body.

Right to the ribs.

Left hook to the jaw.

Right hand across the cheek.

The whole combination lands fast, tight, and ugly, pure boxing stitched into Gunnar's broader violence, and Hakuryu is instantly dazed by the burst of hands he never saw coming.

Mark Bravo: "What a combination!"

John Phillips: "Hakuryu is rocked!"

Gunnar snarls and slaps the injured right leg with one hand, almost like he's waking it back up through fury alone.

Gunnar Van Patton: "Move."

Then he whips a brutal roundhouse into the side of Hakuryu's head, the kick catching right on the ear and sending the White Dragon crashing sideways to the mat.

John Phillips: "Roundhouse to the ear!"

Mark Bravo: "That one turned his lights halfway off!"

Gunnar falls over him into the cover, one forearm across the chest.

Referee: "One! Two!"

Hakuryu kicks out.

John Phillips: "Only two, but Gunnar is alive in this thing!"

The crowd is on its feet now as the champion drags Hakuryu up again by the wrist and the back of the neck. Gunnar does not have the leg for smooth movement anymore, but what he has left is enough to be dangerous if he can chain it together before the pain catches him.

Mark Bravo: "He's running on adrenaline now. You can see it. He ain't stable, but he is absolutely dangerous."

Gunnar hooks the waist and launches Hakuryu with a German suplex.

Hakuryu folds high, lands ugly, and tries to roll through, but Gunnar hangs on.

He drags him backward across the ring and plants his feet again.

Then a second German suplex.

John Phillips: "Two Germans! Gunnar dragging him across the canvas!"

This time Gunnar tries to bridge the pin after the release, trying to keep his shoulders stacked and the weight high enough to steal the fall, but the right knee visibly buckles underneath the pressure of the bridge. The leg trembles, collapses, and Gunnar loses the perfect pinning position almost as soon as he gets it.

Referee: "One! Two!"

Hakuryu kicks free as Gunnar spills sideways off the compromised bridge.

John Phillips: "The knee gave out!"

Mark Bravo: "That's the whole story right there. Gunnar can still hit the offense, but every time he asks that leg to support him afterward, it betrays him."

Gunnar pounds the mat once in frustration, then rises anyway, dragging the bad leg behind him just enough to show the price without letting it stop the hunt. Hakuryu is on all fours now, trying to clear his head, and Gunnar hits the ropes.

He comes back with Springwood Slasher.

The Pepsi Twist clothesline catches Hakuryu flush and turns him inside out.

John Phillips: "Springwood Slasher!"

Mark Bravo: "He wiped him out!"

The crowd explodes again, the whole building surging with Gunnar as he fights through the leg and through the damage and through the feeling that this whole comeback is being held together by sheer bad intentions.

John Phillips: "Listen to this place!"

Hakuryu tumbles toward the corner and lands seated against the buckles, chest heaving, trying to recover enough awareness to stand. Gunnar sees it and adrenaline takes the wheel completely now. He storms in, plants off the good leg, and drives the step-up knee into Hakuryu in the corner.

John Phillips: "Devil's Rejects!"

Hakuryu slumps fully to his butt in the corner and Gunnar follows with the bootwash, scraping the sole right across Hakuryu's face in one vicious, contemptuous motion that draws a huge reaction from the crowd.

Mark Bravo: "Oh that was disrespectful!"

John Phillips: "Hakuryu is getting mauled!"

Sinja is pounding the apron now, composure gone again, while Avril watches from the floor with the same unreadable stare, arms crossed, taking in every ounce of the champion's resilience and every weakness exposed by the cost of it.

Gunnar drags Hakuryu out of the corner and pulls him up one more time. The crowd knows what's coming and rises with him. Gunnar traps the half nelson, plants his feet, and starts to lift for FUKSZ.

John Phillips: "He's got him! He's got him for FUKSZ!"

Mark Bravo: "Come on! Come on!"

Hakuryu leaves the mat for just an inch.

Then the right knee crumbles.

Not a dramatic collapse.

A sick, ugly buckle under the weight.

The champion loses the lift.

Hakuryu slips free of the half nelson and drops awkwardly back to his feet and then hands and knees.

Gunnar stumbles backward, catching himself only because the ropes are there to stop the full spill.

John Phillips: "No! The leg gave out again!"

Mark Bravo: "He had him dead to rights, and the leg just would not hold!"

Neither man is up now.

Hakuryu on his knees, chest heaving, face twisted with pain and effort.

Gunnar leaning against the ropes, one hand gripping the cable, the other clamped to the right knee, eyes wide with fury at his own body for failing him in the exact second he needed it most.

Then they look at each other.

No words.

No ritual.

No bluff left.

Just hate.

Pure, exhausted, burning hate.

John Phillips: "Look at those stares."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. That ain't strategy anymore. That's two men understanding this fight has crossed into something uglier."

The comeback bought Gunnar more than momentum.

It bought him survival.

It bought him belief.

And it bought the match one final war.

For a moment, neither man moves.

Hakuryu is on one knee, one hand pressed to the mat, breath dragging in and out of him through a chest that Gunnar Van Patton has punished all night.

Gunnar is in the ropes, one hand clamped over the ruined right knee, the other still hooked over the top cable, his jaw set so hard it looks like the teeth might crack before the body does.

And then, slowly, both men stand.

They don't posture.

They don't taunt.

They don't waste what little they have left on theater.

They just step toward the middle of the ring, swaying, exhausted, carrying the full wreckage of the match on their bodies.

John Phillips: "Look at them."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. No trash talk now. No extra nonsense. They both know exactly what this has turned into."

Gunnar reaches the center first.

He plants as best he can, then points down at the canvas between them.

His voice comes out low, mean, and steady.

Gunnar Van Patton: ?????????? (Fight like a damn man.)

Hakuryu stares at him.

Then nods once.

No translation from Sinja.

None needed.

John Phillips: "And Hakuryu accepts."

Mark Bravo: "Good. Because now we're getting the pure version of this. No games. No rituals. Just violence."

They collide in the center.

Not with grappling.

Not with cautious feeling-out.

With impact.

Hakuryu fires a sharp body kick. Gunnar answers with a short hook to the ribs. Hakuryu cracks him with a backfist. Gunnar drives a knee into the midsection. Hakuryu returns a knife-edge chop. Gunnar answers with a forearm across the jaw. Hakuryu whips a kick into the thigh. Gunnar clubs him across the face with a brutal palm heel.

John Phillips: "This is incredible!"

Mark Bravo: "This ain't a wrestling exchange right now. This is a martial arts movie where both guys forgot the stunt team."

The pace builds.

Muay Thai against Karate.

Compact brutality against sharp precision.

Hakuryu throws a superkick. Gunnar blocks part of it on the forearm and answers with a body shot. Hakuryu snaps a kick at the ribs. Gunnar checks it. Hakuryu spins through and lands the Tornado Kick clean against Gunnar's jaw and shoulder.

John Phillips: "Tornado Kick!"

Gunnar staggers.

But only for a heartbeat.

He explodes back forward with a Sagat-style Tiger Knee, driving the strike straight up into Hakuryu's chest and jaw.

The White Dragon gets blasted backward by the impact, both men nearly dropping where they stand.

Mark Bravo: "Tiger Knee!"

John Phillips: "What a counter!"

They separate by half a step.

Both rocked.

Both still standing.

Hakuryu moves first. He jabs Gunnar directly in the throat.

The shot is sudden, ugly, and effective. Gunnar chokes on the breath, and Hakuryu instantly blasts him with a superkick that snaps the champion's head backward. Before Gunnar can even finish falling, Hakuryu hits the ropes and comes flying back with the Praying Standing Moonsault, crashing flush across the chest.

John Phillips: "Praying Standing Moonsault!"

Hakuryu hooks the leg.

Referee: "One—"

Gunnar kicks out immediately.

John Phillips: "At one!"

Mark Bravo: "He kicked out at one!"

The building explodes.

At ringside, Sinja's eyes go wide and he actually takes a step toward the apron, unable to hide his disbelief.

In the ring, Hakuryu sits up and stares at Gunnar.

And there it is.

The first real, undeniable crack of surprise in his composure.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu cannot believe it."

Mark Bravo: "Because most men don't eat that sequence and throw you off them at one unless they're built outta punishment and bad decisions."

The White Dragon rises, frustration now tucked beneath the calm, and immediately grabs Gunnar from behind. He launches him with a belly-to-back suplex, driving the champion hard onto his shoulders and neck. Gunnar rolls to his side, stunned, and Hakuryu turns toward the corner.

John Phillips: "Belly-to-back suplex!"

Hakuryu climbs.

Slowly.

Deliberately.

At the top rope, he pauses and brings his hands together once more in prayer.

The crowd buzzes, knowing what comes next.

Mark Bravo: "Breath of the Dragon. He's going for the kill again."

Hakuryu launches.

Ryu no Kokyu.

The Diving Headbutt lands.

Flush.

Hakuryu folds over into the cover immediately.

Referee: "One! Two!"

At the absolute last possible instant, Gunnar rolls the shoulder.

John Phillips: "He got out!"

Mark Bravo: "That was a blink away! A blink!"

Hakuryu rises slowly now and steps into the middle of the ring. He turns and motions for Gunnar to stand, returning the challenge Gunnar issued earlier.

John Phillips: "Now Hakuryu is giving it back to him."

Mark Bravo: "He's saying, 'Fine. Get up again. I'll put you down myself.'"

Gunnar pulls himself up through pain and rope and sheer refusal. Hakuryu advances immediately, looking to keep the momentum and finally finish the damage he has built. He throws a kick high.

Gunnar sees the opening.

And blocks out every ounce of pain in the leg for one violent sequence.

Body shot.

Forearm to the jaw.

Knee to the ribs.

Hook to the body again.

Elbow across the temple.

Hakuryu stumbles through the barrage, trying to cover, trying to regain his shape, but Gunnar keeps driving him backward with every strike until the White Dragon drops to all fours.

John Phillips: "Gunnar found another gear!"

Mark Bravo: "That's desperation and hate right there! He's not pacing himself anymore—he's just trying to break the man in front of him!"

Gunnar sees Hakuryu on all fours and steps in.

Then spikes him with a curb stomp.

The impact plants Hakuryu face and chest-first into the mat.

John Phillips: "Curb stomp!"

Mark Bravo: "He planted him!"

The crowd erupts again, but Gunnar cannot capitalize.

The second the stomp lands, the right leg screams back to life and the champion snarls in agony, unable to drop into a cover. Instead, he limps and staggers into the nearest corner and drops hard to a seated position against the bottom turnbuckle, clutching the knee with both hands.

John Phillips: "He can't cover!"

Mark Bravo: "That's the tragedy of it! He won the clash, he has Hakuryu down, but the leg won't let him cash it in!"

Hakuryu lies face-down near center ring, stunned and flattened by the stomp. Gunnar sits in the corner, breathing hard through the pain, furious at his own body for failing him at the worst possible second.

Then Sinja moves.

The disciple jumps onto the apron and immediately starts shouting at the referee, waving his arms and demanding attention, eating up precious seconds while the official turns toward him to force him back down.

John Phillips: "Sinja on the apron!"

Mark Bravo: "And he knows exactly what he's doing! Those are the seconds that should be the count!"

Gunnar looks up from the corner, one eye narrowing as he sees it happen. The rage is immediate.

He forces himself up with the ropes, dragging the damaged leg underneath him, and begins limping toward Sinja to deal with him himself.

John Phillips: "Gunnar's had enough!"

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and now the stage is set for something bad to happen."

Gunnar Van Patton drags himself out of the corner and toward the ropes, every step uglier than the last, the right knee barely cooperating now. Sinja is still on the apron, still barking at the referee, still stealing time that should have belonged to the count and the champion's momentum.

John Phillips: "Sinja has completely changed the moment here!"

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and Gunnar knows it. That's why he's going after him himself."

Gunnar reaches the ropes and grabs Sinja by the collar with one violent hand. The disciple's eyes widen as he's yanked halfway through the strands, his feet scrambling for the apron, his staff clattering aside as panic finally replaces devotion.

Gunnar Van Patton: "Ah told ya t'stay outta it."

Sinja chokes out a protest the referee cannot quite make out, and the official moves closer, attention fully fixed on the mess at the ropes. The crowd is roaring now, some begging Gunnar to throw Sinja into the ring, some just screaming because they know the match is teetering on the edge of something ugly.

Referee: "Let him go! Gunnar, let him go!"

And in that same moment, Avril Selene Kinkade moves.

Not quickly.

Not frantically.

Not like a woman swept up in emotion.

She moves with cold precision.

She kneels beside the apron and reaches under the ring.

John Phillips: "What is Avril doing?"

Mark Bravo: "I don't know, and I don't like it."

Her hand comes back holding a crowbar.

She grips it with both hands and rises to her feet, face unreadable, breathing unchanged, body language no different than it had been at any other point in the match. No panic. No anger. No hesitation.

John Phillips: "No. No, no, no..."

Mark Bravo: "That's a damn crowbar!"

Inside the ring, Hakuryu is rising behind Gunnar.

Slowly.

Silently.

Like a ghost coming back into focus.

Avril looks up.

Hakuryu looks down.

Their eyes meet for one brief, chilling second.

No words are spoken.

None are needed.

Avril slides the crowbar into the ring behind Gunnar's back.

The crowd sees it.

The camera sees it.

Gunnar does not.

John Phillips: "The crowd sees it! The camera sees it! Gunnar does not!"

Mark Bravo: "Oh my God... Avril... Avril just slid that weapon right to Hakuryu!"

Still gripping Sinja by the collar, Gunnar shouts at the referee, too focused on the thief in front of him and the official beside him to sense the executioner behind him. Hakuryu bends, picks up the crowbar, and rises to full height with complete economy of motion.

No flourish.

No wild swing.

No scream.

Just one silent step forward.

And then the strike.

The crowbar smashes into Gunnar's right kneecap.

The sound is horrifying.

Metal to bone.

Bone to ruin.

Gunnar lets go of Sinja instantly and collapses, screaming, the leg gone out from under him completely as he crashes to the mat in a heap.

John Phillips: "OH MY GOD!"

Mark Bravo: "HE HIT THE KNEE! HE HIT THE KNEE WITH THE CROWBAR!"

The referee spins around too late, having seen only Gunnar release Sinja and hit the mat. By the time he turns, Hakuryu has already let the weapon drop behind him, hidden from the official's direct line of sight by the angle of bodies and ropes.

Referee: "What happened?! What happened?!"

Hakuryu says nothing.

He doesn't even look at the referee.

He only looks down at Gunnar Van Patton, writhing on the canvas, both hands clutching at the shattered right knee, the scream slowly becoming a guttural, disbelieving growl of pain.

John Phillips: "The referee didn't see it!"

Mark Bravo: "And that means Hakuryu just got away with murder!"

At ringside, Avril steps back from the apron.

She does not smile.

She does not clap.

She does not flinch.

She simply brushes off the front of her blazer with one calm hand and resumes the same composed posture she held all night, arms crossed, expression unreadable.

There is no anger in her face.

No satisfaction.

No visible joy.

This was not betrayal born from rage.

This was selection.

A decision.

A transaction completed.

John Phillips: "Avril Selene Kinkade didn't do that in the heat of the moment."

Mark Bravo: "No. She made a choice. Cold as ice. And that choice was not Gunnar."

On the apron, Sinja drops back down to the floor, wide-eyed and shaken but alive, staring at Avril now with something close to awe. In the ring, Hakuryu stands over the fallen champion, crowbar gone from his hands, calm fully restored, while Gunnar lies broken at his feet, unable to stand.

The betrayal is complete.

Avril has chosen Hakuryu.

Gunnar Van Patton writhes on the mat, both hands clutched around the wrecked right knee, every muscle in his body trying to reject what just happened. The scream has faded into something harsher now, something deeper, a wounded animal sound dragged up from the bottom of the chest. He tries to roll. Tries to crawl. Tries to push up on one hand and one good leg.

It gets him nowhere.

John Phillips: "Gunnar can't stand!"

Mark Bravo: "He can't even fake standing right now. That knee is gone."

Hakuryu does not rush him.

He stands over the fallen champion for one breath.

Then two.

Then he bends and seizes the destroyed right leg with both hands, lifting it off the canvas with slow, merciless precision as Gunnar tries to kick free with the other foot and can't find the leverage to do it.

John Phillips: "What is he doing now?"

Hakuryu forces Gunnar upward just enough to leave the champion half-sitting, half-folded, body twisted around the ruined joint.

Then the White Dragon turns and whips through with the Mandala Hineri.

The outward dragon screw tears Gunnar's leg in the opposite direction, wrenching the already shattered knee with such violence that the entire arena recoils from the sound.

This is not a wrestling transition.

This is finishing a wound.

John Phillips: "OH GOD!"

Mark Bravo: "That knee is destroyed!"

Gunnar's whole body convulses from the torque. His back arches. His hands fly off the mat and then back to the leg as another scream tears loose, louder than before and emptier somehow, a sound pulled out of him by damage rather than anger.

John Phillips: "That was not about control! That was about taking the leg away for good!"

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, Hakuryu ain't trying to beat Gunnar anymore. He's trying to leave part of him behind in this ring."

Hakuryu never breaks rhythm.

He rolls through the Mandala Hineri and immediately threads himself into an inside heel hook, trapping the exact damage the crowbar created and the exact weakness he spent the whole match studying. His hips settle. His hands lock. His posture becomes still again.

Calm.

Final.

John Phillips: "Inside heel hook!"

Mark Bravo: "That's it. That's the kill shot."

Gunnar claws at the mat and tries to turn his body out of the hold, but there is nothing left to turn with. The right knee no longer belongs to effort. It belongs to pain. He cannot power out. He cannot plant. He cannot drag himself to the ropes. He cannot do anything except feel Hakuryu's grip biting deeper into the exact spot Avril sold out to him moments ago.

John Phillips: "He has nowhere to go!"

Mark Bravo: "That's the horror of it. No escape. No base. No ropes. Gunnar is trapped inside the damage."

The champion refuses to tap.

Of course he does.

His hand slams the canvas once, but not in surrender. In fury. His free leg kicks uselessly. His shoulders twist. His fingers scrape at Hakuryu's wrists and forearms, trying to tear apart a hold that is no longer a submission so much as a sentence being carried out.

Referee: "Gunnar! Gunnar, do you want to give it up?!"

Gunnar only growls through clenched teeth, sweat pouring down his face, one visible eye wide with pain and pure refusal.

Gunnar Van Patton: "Go... to hell..."

John Phillips: "He still won't submit!"

Mark Bravo: "Because that's who he is. You're not getting mercy out of Gunnar Van Patton. You're gonna have to shut his body off."

Hakuryu says nothing.

He simply cranks the heel hook deeper.

The torque becomes unbearable. Gunnar's body jerks once. Then again. The resistance slows. The hands that were clawing and striking begin to lose shape. His head drops forward, then snaps back, then forward again. The pain is too much. The leg is too far gone. The body begins to fail where the spirit refuses to bend.

John Phillips: "No... no, he's fading..."

The referee reaches down and lifts Gunnar's arm.

It falls.

Referee: "One!"

The crowd is roaring now, a tidal wave of outrage and disbelief and horror at what they are watching. Some are screaming for Gunnar to fight. Others are screaming at Avril. Others are simply screaming because there is nothing else left to do.

The referee lifts the arm again.

It falls a second time.

Referee: "Two!"

Mark Bravo: "He's not tapping. He's going out!"

The referee lifts Gunnar's arm one final time.

And for the third time, it drops lifelessly to the canvas.

Referee: "Three! Ring the bell!"

DING DING DING!

John Phillips: "It's over! Hakuryu has done it!"

Mark Bravo: "Gunnar never tapped! He passed out from the pain!"

Hakuryu releases the heel hook and rises slowly, breath steadying almost immediately, as if the violence he just committed was only the final step in a ritual he had already finished in his own mind. Gunnar lies unconscious on the canvas, body twisted awkwardly around the wrecked right leg, one hand still curled near the knee as though even in

blackout his body understands where the disaster lives.

Ring Announcer: "Here is your winner... and the NEW WrestleZone Champion..."

Ring Announcer: "HAKURYU!"

The boos are volcanic.

Shock and fury pour down from every section of the CHI Health Center as the full reality settles over the building. The title has changed hands. The White Dragon has climbed the mountain. Gunnar Van Patton has been broken beneath him.

Sinja enters the ring immediately.

Not running.

Not celebrating wildly.

Reverently.

He bows again and again as he approaches, deep and repeated bows of devotion and gratitude, his face painted and solemn, his voice caught somewhere between prayer and relief. The referee offers the WrestleZone Championship, and Sinja takes it like a sacred relic.

John Phillips: "Sinja has entered the ring..."

Sinja kneels before Hakuryu and places the championship belt at the White Dragon's feet like an offering laid before an altar.

Mark Bravo: "That ain't a title presentation. That's worship."

Hakuryu looks down at the gold.

He does not snatch it.

He does not wave it overhead immediately.

He simply bends and picks it up himself, the act feeling less like celebration and more like acceptance of something inevitable.

Then Avril Selene Kinkade steps into the ring.

She never looks at Gunnar.

Not once.

She walks past his unconscious body without pause, without flinch, without even the courtesy of acknowledgement. Her attention is only for the new champion.

John Phillips: "And now Avril is in the ring..."

Mark Bravo: "And she still won't even look at Gunnar. That might be the coldest part of all this."

Hakuryu turns toward her.

Avril stops in front of him.

Neither speaks.

Neither smiles.

Then, in perfect stillness and perfect understanding, Hakuryu and Avril bow to one another.

Not deeply.

Not humbly.

As equals.

As partners in a decision now exposed to the whole world.

John Phillips: "There it is."

Mark Bravo: "Signed and sealed. That wasn't a moment. That was an agreement."

Sinja rises from his knees and steps forward next.

He bows to Avril in turn, lower and longer, acknowledging her place in what has just happened. The image is impossible to misread now. Whatever was secret is not secret anymore.

The alliance is real.

It is public.

And it stands on top of Gunnar Van Patton's unconscious body.

Hakuryu finally looks down at the fallen former champion and speaks one last time, not to the crowd, not to Sinja, not to Avril, but directly to Gunnar, knowing that somewhere inside the darkness, some part of him can still hear.

Hakuryu: ??????????????????????

The line hangs over the ring like a final blessing or final insult. Maybe both.

John Phillips: "You were a warrior. I will not forget that."

Mark Bravo: "That's the kind of respect only a monster gives after he's already taken everything from you."

The camera pulls back slowly now, capturing the full tableau in one unforgettable frame.

Gunnar Van Patton lies unconscious at their feet.

Sinja stands to one side.

Avril Selene Kinkade stands to the other.

And in the center, Hakuryu holds the WrestleZone Championship, cold and still and newly ascended.

John Phillips: "Hakuryu is champion."

Mark Bravo: "The Lycan lies at his feet. And Avril Selene Kinkade now stands in the White Dragon's corner."

The White Dragon has ascended.

And the whole company has just watched a new power rise over the body of the old one.

HAKURYU · ?? · WRESTLEZONE CHAMPION

What Commitment Looks Like

Segment

The camera cuts backstage.

The arena noise is muffled here, reduced to a distant pulse beneath concrete walls and humming fluorescent lights. The energy is different. Tighter. Focused. Not celebratory. Not theatrical. Preparatory.

Inside a sparse locker room, Troy Lindz sits forward on a steel bench, elbows on knees, hands taped, eyes locked on the floor in front of them.

No flamboyance.

No entrance sparkle.

No pose.

Just the fight.

Standing in front of Troy is Eli Creed.

Calm as ever.

White shirt.

Sleeves rolled.

Hands folded loosely in front of him, not like a man giving orders, but like a man delivering a lesson he is certain will be understood if spoken the right way.

And off to one side, leaning against a row of lockers, is Kairo Bey.

The Neon Ace has none of his usual public electricity right now. No grin. No swagger. No rhythm in the shoulders. He watches in silence, dressed down, taped wrists still visible, eyes moving between Eli and Troy like a man trying to understand what he has joined before the whole thing closes around him.

John Phillips: "And there you see them. Eli Creed with Troy Lindz... and Kairo Bey."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and that last part still feels weird to say out loud."

Eli paces once in front of Troy. Slow. Intentional. The kind of movement that makes the room feel smaller without ever becoming aggressive.

Eli Creed: "My name is Eli Creed..."

Eli Creed: "And I'm here to help."

Troy looks up at him, not confused, not skeptical, not even really emotional. Just focused. Locked in. Their braided hair is tight, their breathing slow, their whole posture carrying the discipline Creed has been preaching since he got his hands on them.

Eli Creed: "What waits for you next is not just a title match."

Eli Creed: "It is not just a championship opportunity."

Eli Creed: "It is not just Susanita Ybanez."

He steps a little closer.

Eli Creed: "It is proof."

Eli Creed: "Proof that the breaking mattered."

Eli Creed: "Proof that the bending was not humiliation..."

Eli Creed: "But transformation."

Troy exhales slowly through the nose, eyes narrowing just a little more.

Eli Creed: "Do you understand me?"

Troy Lindz: "Yeah."

Troy Lindz: "I understand."

Creed nods once, pleased, but not outwardly celebratory. That would be too simple. Too human. Too small for the kind of moment he thinks this is.

Eli Creed: "Good."

Eli Creed: "Because tonight is not about proving you belong."

Eli Creed: "That question has already been answered."

Eli Creed: "Tonight is about showing the world what happens when someone stops protecting the version of themselves that keeps failing."

Kairo shifts in the background at that line.

Just slightly.

But Eli notices it.

Of course he does.

Mark Bravo: "That one was for Kairo too."

John Phillips: "No question. Eli Creed never really speaks to just one person in the room."

Eli crouches now in front of Troy, lowering himself to eye level, making the moment more intimate without making it gentler.

Eli Creed: "Susanita is proud."

Eli Creed: "Disciplined."

Eli Creed: "Unshaken."

Eli Creed: "She wears that championship like it proves something permanent."

Eli Creed: "It doesn't."

Eli Creed: "It only proves she has not yet met the version of you I've been building."

Troy's jaw tightens, not with anger, but with acceptance.

Troy Lindz: "Then she's gonna meet them."

Eli smiles faintly.

Eli Creed: "Yes."

Eli Creed: "She is."

He rises again and turns slightly, opening the room back up. Kairo is still there in the background, arms folded now, watching with the kind of silence that says he is listening more than he wants anyone to know.

Eli Creed: "What did we say?"

Troy answers immediately.

Troy Lindz: "Break."

Eli Creed: "And then?"

Troy Lindz: "Bend."

Eli Creed: "And then?"

Troy Lindz: "Build."

Eli nods slowly, then finally turns his head toward Kairo.

Eli Creed: "You hear the difference, don't you?"

Kairo doesn't answer right away.

He just pushes off the locker and straightens, eyes drifting from Troy to Eli.

Kairo Bey: "I hear it."

Eli Creed: "And?"

Kairo looks at Troy longer this time. Really looks. Not at the gear. Not at the body. At the composure. At the control. At the stripped-down stillness of someone who used to enter like spectacle and now sits like a weapon waiting to be picked up.

Kairo Bey: "They're different."

Eli Creed: "No."

Eli Creed: "They're clearer."

That lands.

Kairo does not argue.

John Phillips: "Kairo Bey is still trying to figure out what he's standing in."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, but he's in it now whether he likes hearing that or not."

Eli turns back to Troy and places a hand on their shoulder.

Eli Creed: "When you walk through that curtain, you do not carry doubt with you."

Eli Creed: "You do not carry the old noise."

Eli Creed: "You do not carry the version of yourself that needed the spotlight to feel real."

Eli Creed: "You carry purpose."

Eli Creed: "You carry pain."

Eli Creed: "And you carry the right to take what comes next."

Troy stands now.

Slowly.

Deliberately.

No pose.

No flourish.

Just presence.

Troy Lindz: "I'm ready."

Eli's expression doesn't brighten. It settles. That's better. That's more him.

Eli Creed: "I know."

He looks between both of them now, Troy and Kairo, the current disciple and the uncertain new convert, and for the first time in the segment there is something almost paternal in the tone.

Eli Creed: "Remember what this is."

Eli Creed: "Not a faction."

Eli Creed: "Not a partnership."

Eli Creed: "Not a convenience."

Eli Creed: "A method."

Eli Creed: "A correction."

Eli Creed: "A way forward for those who are tired of almost."

Kairo looks down for a second at that last line, then back up.

Troy doesn't look away from Eli at all.

Eli Creed: "Troy."

Troy Lindz: "Yeah?"

Eli Creed: "Go teach."

Troy nods once.

No smile.

No one-liner.

Just the quiet acceptance of a job to be done.

Troy walks toward the door and Kairo instinctively steps aside to let them pass. As they do, the two exchange a look.

No words.

But something passes there anyway.

Recognition.

Expectation.

The understanding that Kairo is watching a future version of his own path whether he admits it or not.

John Phillips: "Troy Lindz looks locked in."

Mark Bravo: "And Eli Creed looks like a man watching his work walk out the door."

Troy exits the room.

Kairo stays behind for half a beat longer.

Eli doesn't even look at him when he speaks next.

Eli Creed: "Watch closely."

Eli Creed: "This is what commitment looks like."

Kairo says nothing.

But he follows.

The camera lingers on Eli Creed for one final second, alone now in the middle of the room, perfectly calm, perfectly sure, before the segment fades and the next fight draws near.

First Class

Segment

The scene switches.

Melissa Cartwright stands in front of the VICTORIOUS backdrop once again, microphone in hand, trying to maintain some sense of order as the night barrels closer to its final explosion.

Melissa Cartwright: "Melissa Cartwright here backstage, and still to come tonight, our huge six-man main event."

Melissa Cartwright: "Joining me at this time... the UTA Champion, Maxwell Jett... and the Rich Young GRAPPLRZ, Jacoby Jacobs and Darian Darrington."

The camera widens.

And there they are.

Maxwell Jett is front and center, exactly where he believes he belongs, the UTA Championship draped over his shoulder like a luxury item nobody else in the room is qualified to touch. His gear is immaculate, his smug expression somehow even more punchable than usual, and the confidence pouring off him is the kind that only comes from a man who believes the whole company has finally caught up to what he's known all along.

On either side of him stand Jacoby Jacobs and Darian Darrington, dressed in expensive streetwear, radiating that same self-satisfied, moneyed arrogance they always seem to carry like cologne.

John Phillips: "There they are. The UTA Champion and the men who have been standing beside him more and more in recent weeks."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and they look real proud of themselves too. Like three guys who think they just invented friendship and being annoying at the same time."

Melissa Cartwright: "Maxwell, let me start with you. You are still the UTA Champion, you are heading into tonight's main event with Chris Ross and Samuel Scythe both looking for blood, and it seems as though what started as an association has become something more official. How are you viewing tonight?"

Jett smirks immediately.

Maxwell Jett: "Melissa, sweetheart, the first problem with that question is the phrase still the UTA Champion."

He adjusts the title on his shoulder and glances down at it with open admiration.

Maxwell Jett: "As if this is temporary."

Maxwell Jett: "As if this is some kind of fluke."

Maxwell Jett: "As if I woke up one day, tripped over my own greatness, and accidentally became the most important man in this company."

He looks back up, grin widening.

Maxwell Jett: "No, no, no."

Maxwell Jett: "I am the UTA Champion because this company finally has what it should have had all along."

Maxwell Jett: "Class. Style. Intelligence. Star power. Somebody who doesn't look like he was built in a garage and taught emotional regulation by a chainsaw."

Mark Bravo: "Well, that's one way to describe Chris Ross."

John Phillips: "And one likely to make him even angrier than he already is."

Melissa Cartwright: "And tonight's main event? Chris Ross has made it very clear he wants revenge. Samuel Scythe

has made it very clear he wants destruction. Are you at all concerned about what you're walking into?"

Jett actually laughs.

Maxwell Jett: "Concerned?"

Maxwell Jett: "Melissa, the only thing I'm concerned about is whether or not the production truck has enough cameras to properly capture what a humiliation this is about to be for those two Neanderthals."

He gestures to Jacoby and Darian.

Maxwell Jett: "Because unlike Chris Ross, I understand the value of surrounding yourself with quality."

Maxwell Jett: "Unlike Samuel Scythe, I understand that violence without presentation is just ugliness."

Maxwell Jett: "And unlike both of them, I understand that if you're going to dominate a company, you don't do it alone."

Jacoby grins wide and steps in a little closer.

Jacoby Jacobs: "That's facts."

Jacoby Jacobs: "People act like me and Darian just wandered into this picture."

Jacoby Jacobs: "Nah. We saw what everybody else was too broke, too bitter, and too dumb to see."

Jacoby Jacobs: "The future."

Darian nods along, fired up already.

Darian Darrington: "And the future got money, style, gold, and a whole lotta people mad they can't keep up."

Melissa Cartwright: "So this is official, then? This is more than just convenience? More than just one night of shared enemies?"

Jett slowly turns toward Melissa like she's finally asked a question worthy of him.

Maxwell Jett: "You want official?"

Maxwell Jett: "Fine."

He takes one step forward, ensuring he owns the frame even more than he already does.

Maxwell Jett: "Let's make it official."

Maxwell Jett: "What you are looking at is not some temporary arrangement."

Maxwell Jett: "It's not networking."

Maxwell Jett: "It's not convenience."

Maxwell Jett: "It's not three handsome, successful men accidentally finding themselves in the same tax bracket and deciding to hang out."

He smirks again.

Maxwell Jett: "No."

Maxwell Jett: "This is a movement."

Maxwell Jett: "A standard."

Maxwell Jett: "A correction."

Maxwell Jett: "And from this point forward..."

He looks to Jacoby.

Then to Darian.

Then back to the camera.

Maxwell Jett: "We are officially known as First Class."

John Phillips: "First Class."

Mark Bravo: "Oh, brother."

Jacoby loves it instantly.

Jacoby Jacobs: "Yeah. Yeah, that's cold."

Darian Darrington: "That's hard. Real hard."

Maxwell Jett: "Of course it is. I said it."

Melissa Cartwright: "First Class."

Maxwell Jett: "Try to keep up, Melissa."

Jett turns slightly, gesturing between the three of them as though unveiling a stock portfolio he expects everyone else to envy.

Maxwell Jett: "You have the champion."

Maxwell Jett: "You have the influence."

Maxwell Jett: "You have the money."

Maxwell Jett: "You have the look."

Maxwell Jett: "You have the ambition."

Maxwell Jett: "And most importantly..."

His smile sharpens.

Maxwell Jett: "You have three men who know exactly how this place works."

Maxwell Jett: "Chris Ross still thinks rage makes him dangerous."

Maxwell Jett: "Samuel Scythe still thinks standing there and looking like a murder documentary gives him aura."

Maxwell Jett: "What they fail to understand is that tonight isn't about who's angriest."

Maxwell Jett: "It's about who's smartest."

Jacoby Jacobs: "And spoiler alert..."

Jacoby Jacobs: "It ain't them."

Darian Darrington: "Not even close."

Melissa Cartwright: "Chris Ross would likely say this whole thing is just a shield. That all this means is you don't want to stand in front of him alone."

Jett's expression turns amused again, but meaner now.

Maxwell Jett: "And that would be adorable coming from a man who has spent the last two weeks proving that without a target to obsess over, he's basically just a redneck weather event."

Maxwell Jett: "Chris Ross doesn't scare me."

Maxwell Jett: "He bores me."

Maxwell Jett: "He's loud. He's emotional. He's violent. Great."

Maxwell Jett: "You know what that gets you in 2026?"

Maxwell Jett: "Outsmarted."

Maxwell Jett: "Outclassed."

Maxwell Jett: "And if you're lucky, carried to the kind of relevance only I can give you."

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett sounds as arrogant as ever."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, but the annoying part is he also sounds real comfortable right now."

Melissa turns toward Jacoby and Darian.

Melissa Cartwright: "Jacoby. Darian. Tonight puts you in the highest profile match either of you have had in UTA to this point. How seriously are you taking this?"

Jacoby Jacobs: "Seriously?"

Jacoby Jacobs: "Melissa, we're taking this like exactly what it is."

Jacoby Jacobs: "An invitation."

Melissa Cartwright: "An invitation?"

Jacoby Jacobs: "Yeah. To the top floor."

Jacoby Jacobs: "You don't get next to the UTA Champion by accident. You don't get put in the main event by accident. You don't get to stand across from names like Chris Ross and Samuel Scythe unless somebody finally figured out you belong in rooms most people only dream about."

Darian nods aggressively.

Darian Darrington: "And once that bell rings, everybody's gonna learn real quick that First Class ain't just some cute name Maxwell came up with."

Darian Darrington: "It's how we live."

Darian Darrington: "It's how we dress."

Darian Darrington: "It's how we move."

Darian Darrington: "And after tonight, it's how this company starts looking whether people like it or not."

Melissa looks back to Jett for one last question.

Melissa Cartwright: "Final thought, then. On the eve of this main event, what should Chris Ross and Samuel Scythe expect when they step into the ring with First Class?"

Jett takes a breath like the answer is too obvious to need giving.

Maxwell Jett: "They should expect the same thing everybody else eventually gets from me."

Maxwell Jett: "Disappointment."

Maxwell Jett: "Not mine. Theirs."

Maxwell Jett: "Chris Ross is going to realize that being mad doesn't make him special."

Maxwell Jett: "Samuel Scythe is going to realize that standing next to Ace Andrews doesn't automatically make him impressive."

Maxwell Jett: "And together, they are going to learn that when you step in the ring with me..."

He slowly taps the UTA Championship.

Maxwell Jett: "You're not stepping in with a champion."

Maxwell Jett: "You're stepping in with the standard."

He glances to either side at Jacoby and Darian.

Maxwell Jett: "And now?"

Maxwell Jett: "That standard has company."

Jacoby throws up both hands.

Jacoby Jacobs: "First Class, baby."

Darian Darrington: "Top floor only."

Jett gives the camera one final smug look.

Maxwell Jett: "Try not to blink. You might miss the moment this company stops belonging to the past."

Maxwell Jett: "And starts belonging to us."

Melissa lowers the microphone slightly as the three men stand there in all their obnoxious confidence—the champion in the center, the newly named faction flanking him, all of them carrying the smug certainty of men who think the main event is not a threat, but a coronation.

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett, Jacoby Jacobs, and Darian Darrington are now officially First Class."

Mark Bravo: "And I already want to see Chris Ross punch that name right off a t-shirt."

The segment fades with Maxwell Jett front and center, UTA Championship gleaming, as First Class stands together for the first time.

Troy Lindz vs. Susanita Ybanez

Match

The arena lights drop.

Not into pageantry.

Into tension.

A darker amber wash settles over the stage as the opening of "Born This Way" hits, but the energy it creates is not the same old Troy Lindz spectacle anymore. The crowd reacts, loud and split, but the mood is different now. Sharper. Meaner. Less celebration. More confrontation. Troy's Creed-era presentation has shifted into a focused, Muay Thai-influenced entrance and in recent segments they've explicitly framed themselves as "different, focused, awake," with measured steps, no wasted motion, and no posing for approval.

John Phillips: "And now we turn our attention to the United States Championship."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and this entrance tells you everything. This is not the old Troy Lindz coming out here to be adored. This is the version Eli Creed's been molding into a weapon."

Troy Lindz steps through the curtain.

Braided hair tight.

Muay Thai gear on.

Taped hands. Taped feet.

No sequined flourish.

No blown kisses.

No demand for the spotlight.

Just a cold expression and absolute focus.

John Phillips: "There's the challenger."

Mark Bravo: "And look at them. That's not a performer walking out. That's a striker."

Troy pauses only long enough to let the crowd take in the image, then starts down the ramp with measured steps. No wasted motion. Shoulders squared. Breathing slow. Eyes fixed on the ring ahead. In recent entrances since joining Creed, that exact presentation has been emphasized repeatedly: controlled, deliberate, no theatrics, with a Muay Thai stance and a sense of sharpened purpose rather than old chaos.

John Phillips: "Troy Lindz used to thrive on theatrics."

Mark Bravo: "Now they thrive on discipline. We've seen it the last few times out. The stance changed. The pacing changed. The whole philosophy changed."

The crowd noise rises as Troy makes the halfway point and briefly rolls their shoulders once, loosening the neck and upper body like a fighter about to enter a striking pit. Then, just for a second, they lift the guard and shadowbox with two tight Muay Thai elbows before dropping the hands back to ready position. That exact visual has been used recently to underline the shift: tight guard, elbows ready, measured breathing, and a focused Muay Thai bounce rather than old flamboyant posing.

John Phillips: "Look at the stance. Tight guard. Elbows ready."

Mark Bravo: "That's a Muay Thai fighter. That's not by accident."

Troy keeps walking. Still no Eli Creed. Still no Kairo Bey. Just the challenger, alone, exactly as Creed said it would be earlier when he insisted Troy would do this on their own and Kairo would be left to choose his own path.
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John Phillips: "And importantly, Troy is out here by themselves. No Eli Creed. No Kairo Bey. This is Troy Lindz walking into the biggest title opportunity of this new chapter on their own."

Mark Bravo: "Which I actually like. Because now there's nowhere to hide. If this version is real, tonight's where we find out."

Troy reaches ringside and stops dead, staring into the ring before taking the steel steps. No flourish. No grand spin. No invitation for the camera to admire the angles. Just a long, hard look at the battleground in front of them.

John Phillips: "There's a seriousness to Troy Lindz now that we just didn't used to see."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. Before, the performance was the point. Now the performance is gone and all that's left is the pressure."

Troy climbs the steps slowly and steps through the ropes. The moment their boots hit canvas, they settle immediately into a Muay Thai stance, light bounce, hands raised, elbows tucked, breathing measured, scanning distance and space instead of soaking in the crowd. That has been the defining ring-entry beat of recent Troy Lindz matches: step through

the ropes, set the stance, measure the fight.

John Phillips: "And there it is. Right into the stance."

Mark Bravo: "No posing. No spinning. No extra movement. Just guard up, feet under them, and mind on violence."

Troy bounces once. Then twice. Compact. Controlled. Their eyes stay locked on the stage now, waiting for Susanita Ybanez, the United States Champion, to make the walk.

John Phillips: "Troy Lindz looks focused."

Mark Bravo: "More than focused. Awake. And I think Susanita's about to get the version of Troy that doesn't care whether you clap... only whether you survive."

The camera lingers one last second on Troy Lindz in the ring, cold and composed in Muay Thai gear, bouncing lightly and waiting for the champion to answer.

The drums hit.

Heavy.

Immediate.

The lighting across the arena shifts into deep red as fire begins to flicker on the stage, small at first, then growing larger in time with the building tension. The atmosphere changes instantly. Troy Lindz may have brought focus and menace to the ring, but now the champion is coming, and she does not walk with uncertainty.

John Phillips: "And now here comes the champion."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and Susanita Ybanez has not backed down from a challenge yet. She wanted a fightin' reign, and now she's got another real one on her hands."

A loud explosion sounds.

Susanita Ybanez steps through the curtain.

The United States Championship is around her waist. Her face is set. No smile. No hesitation. Just that same calm, grounded confidence that has defined her rise since No Love Lost.

She pauses on the stage in the red glow, letting the moment settle around her without ever looking overwhelmed by it. If anything, she looks steadier because of it.

Ring Announcer: "Hailing from Lambare, Paraguay... 'La reina silencios'... Susanita Ybanez!"

John Phillips: "Susanita Ybanez has carried herself like a champion from the moment she won that title."

Mark Bravo: "And tonight she's looking across the ring at a whole different kind of Troy Lindz. Less flash. More teeth."

Susanita begins her walk down the ramp, one hand briefly resting on the title at her waist. Fire rises behind her in timed bursts, painting the champion in red and gold while the crowd roars its approval. She keeps her eyes forward, locked on the ring, on Troy, on the task.

John Phillips: "There's no mystery in Susanita's body language tonight. She knows exactly what this match is."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. She's not walkin' out here to react to Troy's transformation. She's walkin' out here to beat it."

Inside the ring, Troy Lindz remains in that Muay Thai stance, bouncing lightly, shoulders loose, eyes fixed on the approaching champion. No gestures. No taunts. Just focus.

Susanita sees that too.

And that matters.

Because this is not the Troy she agreed to face weeks ago.

Or maybe it is.

Maybe this is just the first time everyone else is seeing clearly what Troy has become.

John Phillips: "Troy hasn't taken their eyes off Susanita."

Mark Bravo: "And Susanita ain't blinking either. Good. That's how a title match should feel."

Susanita reaches ringside and circles once, never taking her eyes off the challenger. Then she steps onto the apron, leans back, and raises both hands high into the air.

Pyro erupts from the turnbuckles.

The crowd explodes again.

John Phillips: "What a moment for the United States Champion."

Susanita steps through the ropes and walks to the center of the ring. She turns once, lifts the championship from her waist, and raises it high as the lights flash around her. This is not theatrical excess. This is ownership.

Mark Bravo: "That right there? That's not a woman hopin' to survive. That's a champion tellin' you this belt still belongs to her."

She lowers the title and hands it to the referee, then backs into her corner, still staring across the ring at Troy Lindz. The contrast is striking now.

Troy, all discipline and compressed violence.

Susanita, all poise and conviction.

No wasted movement from either one.

No fear from either one.

John Phillips: "The challenger has changed. The champion has not wavered. And now we are set."

Mark Bravo: "United States Championship on the line. Susanita Ybanez versus Troy Lindz. This one could get real serious real fast."

The referee steps toward the center of the ring and raises the title high overhead as the crowd rises with anticipation.

Champion and challenger stare each other down.

The bell is next.

The referee steps into the middle of the ring, the United States Championship raised high overhead while the crowd buzzes with anticipation.

Troy Lindz stands in their corner in that tight Muay Thai stance, shoulders loose, guard ready, eyes fixed on Susanita Ybanez without a flicker of distraction.

Across from them, Susanita bounces lightly on the balls of her feet, calm and composed, her focus every bit as intense as the challenger's.

John Phillips: "This is what it's all about. The United States Championship on the line."

Mark Bravo: "And this one feels different already. You got Susanita, who's all heart and pride, against a Troy Lindz that looks like they've taken all the old noise and compressed it into a fist."

The referee hands the title off and calls both competitors forward.

Referee: "Alright. Keep it clean. Ready?"

Susanita gives a short nod.

Troy says nothing.

They just keep staring.

The bell rings.

DING DING DING!

John Phillips: "And we are underway!"

The two begin circling immediately, but the rhythm is strange in the best possible way.

Susanita moves with familiar athletic confidence, light on her feet, hands active, reading distance with quick lateral steps.

Troy circles much more compactly, less bounce, more coiled danger. Guard high. Elbows tucked. Measuring everything.

Mark Bravo: "You can see the difference in Troy right away. Before, they might've played to the crowd here. Maybe struck a pose. Maybe tried to make this their stage."

John Phillips: "Now it looks like they only care about range and timing."

Susanita feints first with the lead shoulder and then a quick step in, testing whether Troy will bite.

Troy doesn't.

Just pivots.

Adjusts.

Stays square.

John Phillips: "Very disciplined start from the challenger."

Mark Bravo: "And Susanita's too smart to rush into that. She's reading the change too."

They circle again.

This time Susanita darts in with a quick low kick to the outside thigh and immediately pulls back out.

Troy absorbs it without much reaction, but their eyes sharpen.

John Phillips: "First clean contact goes to the champion."

Susanita circles left, then flashes in again with another quick kick, this time toward the calf. Troy turns the shin just enough to lessen the effect and begins stepping forward for the first time, subtly taking ground.

Mark Bravo: "There it is. Troy didn't love the kick, but look at the response. Now they're the one pushing the center."

Susanita changes levels and reaches for a collar-and-elbow tie-up. Troy meets her, but the lock-up is less about strength and more about pressure. Troy's forearms and shoulders do not strain so much as settle, using posture and leverage instead of theatrical resistance.

Susanita turns the angle and forces the break before either can gain a clean advantage.

John Phillips: "Good opening exchange."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and both learned something. Susanita learned Troy's stronger in close than they used to be. Troy learned Susanita's still too quick to just bully."

They reset.

Troy steps in first this time and flicks a probing jab, not to score, but to touch range. Susanita slips outside it and answers with a quick forearm to the shoulder, then a snap kick toward the midsection.

Troy drops the elbow to catch most of it.

Then fires a sudden low kick of their own into Susanita's thigh.

John Phillips: "Sharp counter by Troy Lindz."

Mark Bravo: "That's Muay Thai rhythm right there. Touch, read, punish."

Susanita circles out and smiles just a little.

Not mockery.

Recognition.

Like she appreciates that this is going to be a real fight.

She comes back in with more urgency now, firing a quick jab-cross and then stepping off line into a spinning back kick toward the body. Troy brings both forearms in tight and absorbs it, but the impact still knocks them back a half-step.

John Phillips: "Good combination from Susanita!"

Troy immediately answers with a whipping low kick to the leg and then a left hook to the body that catches Susanita on the ribs just as she tries to move away. Susanita winces and gives up a step, and Troy follows, not recklessly, but with enough intent to keep the champion from settling.

Mark Bravo: "That body shot landed. Troy's starting to put layers on this."

Susanita plants and throws a sharp enzuigiri from a near-standing position, trying to surprise the challenger with sudden athleticism. Troy leans away just enough that the kick glances instead of detonates, and when Susanita lands, Troy chops the inside thigh with another low kick.

John Phillips: "Troy is doing a very good job taking the flash and answering it with damage."

The crowd begins to clap for Susanita as she resets again. The champion nods once, brings her hands up, and starts circling with more bounce. She feints high, then darts in low, catching Troy with a quick leg kick and following immediately with a slap of a forearm across the jaw.

Troy's head turns.

Then turns right back.

And for the first time, the old Troy peeks through just a little.

Not in a pose.

Not in a flourish.

Just in the way they smile once and mouth something to Susanita before stepping in harder.

Mark Bravo: "Oh, there's still some Troy in there. Don't get it twisted."

Troy closes distance behind a tight jab, then lands a hard kick into Susanita's lead leg. Susanita tries to answer with a ripcord knee setup, but Troy stuffs it by crowding the space and forcing her into a clinch before she can fully rotate

through.

John Phillips: "Interesting adjustment!"

In the clinch, Troy works fast and ugly.

Short knee to the body.

Then another.

Susanita fights for inside position, throws a forearm up through the frame, and breaks free before the clinch can become a real problem. She spins out, hits the ropes, and comes back with a running dropkick to Troy's chest that sends the challenger stumbling backward into the ropes.

John Phillips: "Nice dropkick from the champion!"

Mark Bravo: "That's what Susanita has to do. Keep this thing from staying chest-to-chest for too long."

Troy rebounds and Susanita keeps the pressure, charging in with a step-up forearm that knocks Troy toward the corner. The champion follows with a second forearm and then a snapmare attempt out of the buckles, but Troy widens the base and blocks it.

Susanita adjusts immediately, slipping behind for a waistlock.

Troy reaches down for the hands, shifts their hips, and peels free before spinning to face her again.

John Phillips: "Excellent counter wrestling from both sides."

Mark Bravo: "That's why this is good already. Susanita ain't just speed. Troy ain't just strikes. Both of 'em came ready for layers."

The two pause for a brief second, not from hesitation, but to re-measure.

Susanita breathes through her nose and nods once.

Troy lifts the guard again and rolls their shoulders loose.

Then they meet in the center once more, the early feeling-out complete, both already understanding this one will not be won cheaply.

John Phillips: "An excellent opening stretch here for the United States Championship."

Mark Bravo: "And neither one of them has blinked yet."

The circling tightens again.

No wasted motion now.

No more broad reads.

Both Susanita Ybanez and Troy Lindz have seen enough of each other to know this is not going to be decided with one clean opening. The next phase is about taking something away.

John Phillips: "The feeling-out process is over."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, now it's about adjustments. What can Susanita speed up? What can Troy slow down?"

Susanita strikes first again, darting in with a quick low kick, then stepping off-line and whipping a forearm toward Troy's jaw. Troy absorbs the kick, slips just outside the forearm, and answers with a sharp kick of their own to the thigh. Susanita plants through it and comes back with another forearm, this one landing flush enough to turn Troy's head.

John Phillips: "Susanita finding the mark there."

Troy answers instantly.

Left hook to the body.

Right low kick.

Then a straight elbow up through the middle that makes Susanita pull back a half-step to reset.

Mark Bravo: "Troy's building that Muay Thai rhythm now. Touch low, touch the body, then come right up the center."

Susanita keeps moving, circling out before the challenger can trap her in another clinch. She hits the ropes and returns with a running crossbody, trying to turn the pace suddenly and catch Troy before the stance can settle.

Troy catches her.

Not perfectly.

But well enough to stop the momentum.

The crowd reacts as Troy holds Susanita for a beat, adjusts, and drives her down with a controlled fallaway slam that sends the champion rolling toward the ropes.

John Phillips: "What a counter by Troy Lindz!"

Mark Bravo: "That's the power people forget about. Troy can still catch you and make you pay if you get reckless."

Susanita gets up quickly, one hand brushing the small of her back as she resets. Troy doesn't chase immediately. That's another difference now. The challenger takes one breath, lifts the guard again, and stalks in with purpose instead of emotion.

John Phillips: "Very measured pace from Troy."

Mark Bravo: "Which is probably making Susanita work even harder, honestly. You can't bait somebody who refuses to bite on the wrong beat."

Troy closes distance and lands a kick to the body.

Then another to the leg.

Susanita tries to answer with a quick snap DDT out of nowhere, catching the challenger as they step in, but Troy blocks the head position, shoves her off, and meets her rebound with a brutal standing knee to the ribs.

John Phillips: "That one folded Susanita up!"

The champion stumbles backward, one arm instinctively wrapping around her side, and Troy sees the opening. They step in and crack a knife-edge chop across Susanita's chest, then follow it with a sudden little burst of old Troy—a mocking half-smirk and a tiny flourish of the wrist—before driving a big boot into the champion's upper chest that knocks her into the corner.

Mark Bravo: "There's a little bit of the old showman still in there."

John Phillips: "Yeah, but now it's in service of the violence."

Troy closes in fast and drives a shoulder into Susanita's midsection in the corner. Then another. Susanita tries to bring a forearm down across the back, but Troy catches the arm, steps back, and spins her out of the corner by the wrist.

Susanita stumbles toward center ring and Troy whips around with Standing Ovation, the spinning wheel kick catching her clean on the side of the head.

John Phillips: "Standing Ovation!"

Susanita drops to a knee.

Troy charges the ropes, rebounds, and looks for a running powerslam—Encore Slam—but Susanita slips off the back before the lift is fully secured. She shoves Troy forward, sends them into the ropes, and catches the rebound with a quick step-in belly-to-belly suplex that throws the challenger clean across the ring.

John Phillips: "What a response from the champion!"

Mark Bravo: "That's how you stop somebody from settling in. You hit 'em with force they weren't expecting."

The crowd comes alive as Susanita rises and motions Troy up. Lindz gets to one knee first, then both boots, and Susanita hits the ropes before they're fully steady. She flies back with a running knee strike to the face that rocks the challenger backward into the corner.

Now the champion pours it on.

Forearm in the corner.

Then another.

Then a snapmare out of the buckles.

Troy tries to stand right away, but Susanita catches them with a basement dropkick to the face before they can get fully vertical.

John Phillips: "Susanita is stringing together real offense now!"

Mark Bravo: "And Troy's gotta be careful here. Susanita's at her best when the rhythm gets frantic and she can start layering one thing into another."

Susanita pulls Troy up again and whips them toward the ropes. Troy rebounds and Susanita catches them with a spinning back kick to the body that doubles the challenger over. Without hesitation she hooks the head and spikes Troy with a snap DDT.

John Phillips: "Snap DDT!"

Susanita hooks the leg.

Referee: "One! Two!"

Troy kicks out.

Mark Bravo: "Good kick-out, but Susanita's making progress."

The champion rises first and starts to build momentum with the crowd behind her now. She backs toward the ropes, eyes on Troy, measuring something bigger. Lindz gets to a seated position and Susanita breaks into a run, looking for the curb stomp.

Troy rolls at the last second.

Susanita stomps canvas instead of skull and has to catch herself before tumbling forward.

John Phillips: "Nobody home!"

Troy is back up quickly enough to capitalize. They spin Susanita around by the shoulder and crack her across the jaw with Curtain Call, the sudden superkick halting the champion in place.

Mark Bravo: "Curtain Call! That came outta nowhere!"

Susanita staggers, still upright only because instinct has not yet allowed the body to collapse. Troy steps in, wraps around the waist, and drives her down with Encore Slam, the running powerslam finally connecting clean in the center

of the ring.

John Phillips: "Encore Slam connects!"

Troy hooks the leg deep.

Referee: "One! Two!"

Susanita gets the shoulder up.

Mark Bravo: "And there's the champion. Still there."

Troy sits up, breathing harder now, but not frustrated. Not angry. Just thinking. They glance toward Susanita, then toward the ropes, then back down again, recalculating what has to come next. Across the ring, Susanita rolls to one side, clutching her ribs and jaw, still hurting but very much still in the fight.

John Phillips: "This match is settling into something really strong here."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. Susanita's making Troy work. Troy's making Susanita hurt. And neither one of them looks close to done."

The crowd stays loud as both champion and challenger begin the slow climb back up, each now carrying the damage of the other and each understanding the next sequence might be the one that truly turns the whole thing.

Troy Lindz gets to their feet first, but only by a beat.

Susanita Ybanez is already rising behind them, one hand at her ribs, the other on the mat, eyes narrowed and focused through the sting of the superkick and powerslam. The challenger breathes through the nose, shoulders lifting once, twice, guard coming back up.

John Phillips: "Both of them are feeling this now."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and that's where title matches start getting real. The offense still matters, but now it's about who can think while they're hurt."

Troy steps in behind a jab, then another, testing the range before firing a low kick into Susanita's lead leg. The champion absorbs it and answers with a sharp forearm to the jaw. Troy takes the shot, pivots, and slams a kick into Susanita's body that forces her to give up a step.

John Phillips: "Troy back to those compact strikes."

Susanita doesn't let the challenger string too much together. She circles out, hits the ropes, and comes back with a running forearm that catches Troy high and knocks them backward toward the corner. Susanita follows with a second forearm and then tries to run Troy all the way out with a snapmare.

Troy blocks it again.

This time they answer immediately with a short elbow to the side of the head, then a knee to the body that folds Susanita over just long enough for Troy to hook the arms and throw her overhead with a snap suplex.

Mark Bravo: "That was slick."

John Phillips: "Troy still showing they can blend the striking with the power game."

Susanita sits up quickly from the suplex, but Troy is already on her, stepping in with a knife-edge chop across the chest that echoes through the arena. Susanita winces and Troy, just for a second, lets a little bit of that old personality flicker through again—a pointed look to the crowd, a tiny, mocking nod—before they whip Susanita into the ropes.

Susanita rebounds and Troy swings for a clothesline.

Susanita ducks it.

Hits the far side again.

Comes back with a running crossbody.

This time Troy doesn't catch her clean. The champion's momentum carries both of them down to the mat, and Susanita rolls through into a quick cover.

Referee: "One! Two!"

Troy kicks out.

John Phillips: "Nice counter from the champion!"

Susanita pops up and stays aggressive. She catches Troy on the way up with a kick to the body, then another, then a spinning heel kick that clips the side of the head and sends the challenger stumbling into the ropes.

Mark Bravo: "Susanita's finding her burst again."

The champion charges, looking to follow with a running attack, but Troy catches the approach and throws a tight elbow through the center line that stops her cold. Susanita stumbles. Troy grabs at the head and shoulder, trying to spin her around into Center Stage, but Susanita feels it coming and drops low, slipping underneath before the discus lariat can connect.

John Phillips: "Good escape by Susanita!"

She springs up behind Troy, shoves them into the ropes, and on the rebound catches them with a picture-perfect arm drag that sends Lindz skidding across the canvas. Troy pops back up fast, but Susanita is faster. Basement dropkick to the chest. Troy tumbles backward again and rolls toward the corner.

Mark Bravo: "That's the kind of pace Susanita wants. Quick resets. Quick attacks. Never let Troy settle into that striking rhythm."

Susanita sees Troy seated in the corner and charges. She drives in with a running forearm, then backs up two steps and hits a second one. The crowd roars as the champion keeps pouring it on. Troy stumbles out of the corner and Susanita tries for the ripcord knee smash.

Troy spins free before the knee lands flush.

Susanita's momentum carries her slightly past.

Troy turns and blasts her with a short spinning wheel kick—Standing Ovation—that catches the champion clean and drops her to both knees.

John Phillips: "Standing Ovation again!"

Mark Bravo: "That move's a problem, man. Comes out fast and it changes everything."

Susanita tries to rise off instinct alone, but Troy is already measuring distance. One step in. Guard up. Then a sudden Curtain Call superkick that snaps Susanita's head back and leaves her hanging in place for a split second before she crumples backward to the mat.

John Phillips: "Curtain Call!"

Troy doesn't cover right away.

Instead they back up, breathing harder now, and gesture for Susanita to rise. Not a grand pose. Not a theatrical taunt. More like a challenger who knows the champion is too tough to stay down and wants to end this the right way.

Mark Bravo: "That's confidence right there. Troy wants a clean finish."

Susanita crawls to the ropes, pulling herself up with visible effort. The champion is hurting now, but there is still fight in the eyes. Troy closes in and throws a body kick. Susanita catches part of it on the forearm and answers with a slap of a forearm across the face. Troy fires back with a low kick. Susanita returns a forearm. Troy answers with a body shot. Susanita comes back with another forearm.

John Phillips: "Now they're just trading!"

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and Susanita's heart is dragging her right back into this thing."

The forearms come quicker now. Susanita lands one. Then another. Troy answers with a hard kick to the thigh, then a short elbow. Susanita stumbles but refuses to go down. She hits the ropes, rebounds, and blasts Troy with a running knee strike that catches them right under the jaw.

John Phillips: "What a knee!"

Troy drops to one knee. Susanita sees her opening and quickly hits the ropes again, looking for La estrella negra, the springboard Asai moonsault that has put so many away.

She springs.

Troy gets the knees up.

Susanita crashes down onto them and immediately clutches at her ribs again, rolling to one side in pain.

Mark Bravo: "Oh no! That is a disaster for the champion!"

John Phillips: "Susanita may have just handed Troy the opening they needed!"

Troy gets up slower than they would like, but the opening is there. They pull Susanita to her feet, hook her in tight, and hoist her high for Final Bow, the sit-out powerbomb. The crowd rises as Troy holds her there for one second, the pause building the moment.

Then Susanita starts fighting.

Hands pounding at the shoulders.

Body twisting.

Troy tries to keep control, but the champion drops off the back before the sit-out lands. Susanita shoves Troy into the corner and then catches the rebound with a sudden tornado DDT that spikes the challenger right in the center of the ring.

John Phillips: "Tornado DDT! Susanita escaped!"

Mark Bravo: "What a counter! I thought that was done!"

Both competitors are down now.

The crowd roars and claps, trying to will the champion and challenger back into motion as the referee begins his count.

Referee: "One!... Two!... Three!..."

Susanita crawls toward the ropes.

Troy rolls toward the opposite side.

Both are slower.

Both are hurting.

And both know the match has crossed into that dangerous final stretch where one mistake could end the reign or make the challenger's transformation complete.

John Phillips: "This United States Championship match is turning into a war."

Mark Bravo: "And the scary part? I still don't know who has the better next shot in them."

The referee's count keeps climbing, but both competitors are moving now, fueled by instinct more than comfort.

Referee: "Four!... Five!..."

Susanita Ybanez reaches the ropes first and drags herself upward, one hand still pressing at her ribs where Troy Lindz got the knees up on the moonsault. Across the ring, Troy uses the bottom rope to pull to one knee, then to both boots, their breathing tighter now, chest heaving, face set in hard concentration.

John Phillips: "Neither one of them is getting up clean."

Mark Bravo: "Nope. This is the part where the title's still in the ring, but both bodies are trying to negotiate with reality."

The count stops as both make it upright.

Susanita pushes off the ropes first and steps in with a forearm. Troy answers with one of their own. Susanita fires back. Troy answers again. The exchange turns ugly fast, both of them too tired for finesse and too proud to back off.

John Phillips: "Forearm exchange in the center!"

Mark Bravo: "And this is where championship grit shows up. No elegance now. Just who can still hit through the pain."

Susanita lands two in a row and then whips a quick body kick into Troy's side. Troy absorbs it, steps through it, and slams a knee into Susanita's stomach. The champion doubles for half a second and Troy immediately snaps a low kick into the thigh, then a second one, trying to take the legs away and stop Susanita's bounce for good.

John Phillips: "Troy back to the leg game."

Susanita nods through the sting and steps back in with a ripcord setup, trying to yank Troy into the Rip Cord Knee Smash. Troy reads it at the last second and twists just enough that the knee clips rather than crushes. The glancing blow still rocks the challenger backward into the ropes.

Mark Bravo: "Even partial, that one had plenty on it."

Susanita doesn't hesitate. She hits the ropes and comes charging in, looking for another running strike to keep Troy pinned in place, but Lindz catches the approach with a sudden clinch. One hand behind the neck. One around the arm. Tight, ugly, practical. Troy drives a short knee into the body. Then another. Then shoves Susanita loose just enough to whip a high kick at the head.

Susanita ducks it.

Troy spins through.

Susanita catches them with a step-up enzuigiri right behind the ear.

John Phillips: "Enzuigiri!"

The challenger drops to one knee. Susanita sees the opening and darts to the ropes, looking for speed again, looking to make the ring hers before Troy can recover.

She rebounds into a running meteora attempt—

Troy rolls through the lane and Susanita lands hard on her knees and shins instead, momentum breaking at the worst possible second.

Mark Bravo: "Oh, that hurt nobody but the champion."

Troy rises behind her and blasts her with Center Stage, the discus lariat landing flush and turning Susanita inside out.

John Phillips: "Center Stage! What a shot!"

The crowd gasps as Susanita flips and lands hard near center ring. Troy doesn't waste time this time. They crawl into the cover immediately, hooking the leg deep.

Referee: "One! Two!"

Susanita kicks out.

John Phillips: "Still alive!"

Mark Bravo: "And Troy can't believe it, but that was the right move. No posing, no delay, straight into the pin."

Troy rises slower now, clearly feeling the accumulation of the match, but there's no panic. They back up into the corner and watch Susanita struggle to her hands and knees, then to one foot, then both. Troy waits for the champion to fully turn.

Then charges.

A running knee strike catches Susanita flush in the corner and leaves her slumped against the buckles.

John Phillips: "Big knee in the corner!"

Troy follows with a bootwash across the face, scraping the sole through with cold contempt before backing up two steps and dragging Susanita out of the corner by the wrist.

Mark Bravo: "That was nasty."

Susanita is barely vertical as Troy scoops her up again for Final Bow. This time the lift is cleaner. The champion kicks and twists, but she's higher and more controlled. The crowd rises, sensing the title on the line in a very real way now.

John Phillips: "Troy has her up! This could be it!"

But Susanita fights from above.

Elbows to the side of the head.

One.

Two.

Three.

Troy's grip loosens just enough for the champion to slip down the back again. Susanita shoves Lindz forward into the ropes and catches the rebound with a spinning back kick to the stomach, doubling the challenger over. Without pause, she grabs the head and spikes Troy with another Snap DDT.

John Phillips: "Snap DDT! Susanita counters again!"

Mark Bravo: "That champion just refuses to let the finish happen to her."

Both are down for a beat, but Susanita forces herself over for the cover.

Referee: "One! Two!"

Troy gets the shoulder up.

John Phillips: "Another near fall!"

Susanita sits up, hair hanging into her face, breathing hard, trying to gather enough of herself for the next move. Across from her, Troy rolls to the ropes and drags in air, one hand over the jaw, the other planted on the canvas.

Mark Bravo: "This is real good stuff now. Troy's transformation is real, but Susanita's championship heart is just as real."

The champion gets to her feet first and backs toward the ropes, clearly thinking big. The crowd starts to rise with her. Troy is on one knee, trying to get the rest of the way up, and Susanita sprints.

Curb Stomp.

Troy jerks the head away at the last instant.

Susanita stomps canvas.

Troy pops up off the dodge and lands Curtain Call again, the superkick catching Susanita flush on the jaw.

John Phillips: "Curtain Call again!"

The champion staggers in place and Troy immediately follows with a running powerslam—Encore Slam—driving Susanita down with force in the center of the ring.

Mark Bravo: "Encore Slam! That's gotta be it!"

Troy hooks both legs.

Referee: "One! Two! Thr—!"

Susanita kicks out.

John Phillips: "No! Susanita survives!"

Mark Bravo: "I thought that was over! Troy thought that was over!"

The challenger sits back on their knees for a second, stunned but not broken, then rises and starts backing into the corner again. The look on Troy's face says the answer now is not another setup move. Not another sequence.

The answer is the finish.

John Phillips: "Troy Lindz may be thinking Final Bow one more time."

Susanita is dragging herself up with the ropes, blinking hard, still champion, still defiant, still in it. Troy steps out of the corner, stalking forward with measured intent, ready to make the next touch the one that changes everything.

Troy Lindz steps out of the corner with that same measured purpose, no rush in the body, no panic in the eyes, just the clear intention of someone who believes the next sequence must end the match. Across from them, Susanita Ybanez is using the ropes to pull herself upright, blinking hard, one hand still at the top strand, the other hovering instinctively near her ribs.

John Phillips: "Both of them are deep in this now."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and that's when every movement matters. One wrong breath. One bad plant. One half-second of hesitation. That's all it takes."

Troy closes in and reaches for Susanita's wrist, looking to pull her away from the ropes and set the finish. But the champion still has enough left in the tank to fight the hands. She yanks free once, then twice, and fires a forearm into Troy's jaw that snaps the challenger's head to the side.

John Phillips: "Susanita still fighting!"

Troy eats the shot and comes right back with a low kick to the thigh. Susanita stumbles but does not go down. She

answers with another forearm. Troy responds with a body kick that lands flush enough to fold the champion over for half a second.

Mark Bravo: "That's the war right there. Susanita still has enough fight to throw. Troy still has enough discipline to answer."

Susanita tries to create space, but Troy crowds her chest-to-chest and brings the Muay Thai clinch back. One hand behind the head. One controlling the arm. A short knee to the body lands. Then another. Susanita fights to break the frame, driving a forearm up through the middle and turning her shoulder to slip out before the clinch becomes a full trap.

John Phillips: "Good escape by the champion."

She spins toward the ropes and springs back with sudden speed, looking for a running knee strike to catch Troy before the challenger can reset. Troy sees it late but not too late and turns just enough that the knee glances off the shoulder and jaw instead of landing flush.

Still, it rocks them.

Mark Bravo: "Even the glancing shot had something on it."

Susanita keeps moving. She hits the ropes again, trying to build one of those frantic bursts that can tilt a match in a hurry. Troy steadies, plants, and as the champion returns, catches her with a big boot straight to the chest that halts the whole charge cold.

John Phillips: "Big boot!"

Susanita staggers backward, sucking in air, and Troy immediately steps through with a sharp little curtsy after the impact, just enough of the old Troy surfacing to twist the knife without breaking the new focus.

Mark Bravo: "There's that flash again. Just enough to remind you the old Troy still lives in there somewhere."

Now Troy grabs for the waist and muscles Susanita up for Final Bow again. The crowd rises as the champion gets lifted high, Troy pausing with her elevated, the sit-out powerbomb one drop away from a title change.

John Phillips: "This could be it!"

But Susanita keeps fighting in the air.

She hammers down with clubbing forearms. One to the shoulder. One to the upper back. One to the side of the head. Troy tries to keep the hold, but the champion twists just enough to slide off the back one more time.

The arena roars.

Susanita lands, stumbles, then hits the ropes and comes flying back with a running crossbody.

This time Troy catches her momentum for only a split second before the body shifts and Susanita uses that catch against them, rolling through into a crucifix-style pin attempt.

Referee: "One! Two!"

Troy kicks free.

John Phillips: "Close one!"

Mark Bravo: "Susanita almost stole it there!"

Both scramble up fast. Susanita lands a forearm. Troy answers with one. Susanita kicks the leg. Troy kicks the body. Susanita fires a spinning heel kick and catches Troy high enough to send them into the ropes. The challenger rebounds and Susanita meets them with a Rip Cord Knee Smash this time, pulling them into it with perfect timing.

John Phillips: "Rip Cord Knee Smash!"

Troy gets rocked badly and stumbles backward into the corner. Susanita sees it and charges, driving a meteora into the buckles that crushes the challenger where they stand.

Mark Bravo: "Susanita is throwing everything at them now!"

Troy staggers out of the corner and Susanita immediately spins, looking for the Curb Stomp again. The crowd comes up as the champion surges forward—

but Troy drops to one knee and turns just enough that Susanita's foot clips the shoulder and back instead of planting the skull.

John Phillips: "She didn't get all of it!"

That half-miss is enough.

Troy pops back up off instinct, catches Susanita on the turn, and drills her with another Curtain Call superkick. This time the champion's legs nearly give out completely.

Mark Bravo: "Curtain Call again! Susanita's all over the place!"

Troy doesn't waste a second. They hook her around the waist, turn, and drive her down with Final Bow, the sit-out powerbomb finally landing clean in the middle of the ring.

John Phillips: "FINAL BOW!"

Mark Bravo: "That's it! That has got to be it!"

Troy stacks the champion up and hooks both legs deep.

Referee: "One! Two! Thr—!"

Susanita gets a shoulder up.

John Phillips: "No! Susanita kicked out!"

Mark Bravo: "How in the hell did she survive that?!"

Troy remains over her for a second, stunned, breathing hard, trying to comprehend the kick-out. The crowd is roaring now, fully split between disbelief and admiration for the champion's refusal to let go of the title.

John Phillips: "Susanita Ybanez is showing exactly why she is the United States Champion!"

Troy gets up slowly and drags both hands back across the braided hair, not frustrated in the wild sense, but visibly recalibrating. Susanita is still down, chest rising and falling sharply, one arm across her midsection, the other moving instinctively as if searching for ropes that are too far away.

Mark Bravo: "This is where we find out what Troy's transformation really means. Because the old version might've lost composure there. This version? This version has to decide what comes next."

Troy nods to himself once.

Then backs toward the corner.

Not to retreat.

To line up one last shot.

The champion begins to stir.

The crowd senses another turning point coming.

And the next breath could decide whether Susanita's reign survives... or whether Troy Lindz completes the biggest transformation of their career with championship gold in hand.

Troy Lindz backs into the corner and sets their feet.

No theatrics now.

No flourish.

Just breath.

Just timing.

Just the look of a challenger who knows they are one clean strike away from changing everything.

John Phillips: "Troy is measuring this."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and that's bad news for Susanita. Because when somebody stops thinking about the moment and starts thinking about the finish, that's when titles change hands."

Susanita Ybanez rolls slowly onto her side, then to both knees, her face twisted with pain and determination. The kick-out from Final Bow took everything she had, and now she is pulling herself upright on instinct and championship pride alone.

Troy waits.

One bounce.

Then another.

Their hands come up high, elbows tucked, body angled.

Susanita rises fully and turns.

Troy explodes out of the corner with another Curtain Call superkick aimed straight at the jaw—
but Susanita drops under it at the last second.

The kick whistles over her head.

The crowd erupts.

John Phillips: "She ducked it!"

Mark Bravo: "That was instinct! Pure instinct!"

Susanita comes up out of the duck and immediately spins Troy around by the wrist, pulling the challenger into her body and driving a sharp knee up into the ribs. Troy folds for just a second, and Susanita hooks the head, trying to spike them with another snap DDT.

Troy blocks.

Susanita tries to force it anyway.

Troy plants and shoves her off.

Susanita hits the ropes, rebounds, and gets caught in a hard Muay Thai clinch.

John Phillips: "Troy shut the DDT down!"

One short knee to the body lands.

Then another.

Susanita tries to frame out with a forearm and almost gets free, but Troy keeps one hand behind the head and whips a sudden knee higher this time, catching the champion up under the chin enough to rock her backward.

Mark Bravo: "That clinch is murder right now."

Susanita stumbles away, still upright, still swinging. She throws a forearm that lands. Then another. Troy answers with a body kick. Susanita answers with a backfist. Troy answers with a low kick to the thigh. The crowd is roaring with every shot now, sensing that both of them are fighting through fumes and conviction more than anything else.

John Phillips: "Neither one will give an inch!"

Mark Bravo: "That's what championship matches do. They drag the truth out of you."

Susanita lands one more forearm and turns, trying to spring toward the ropes for one final burst of speed. Troy sees it and cuts the lane off, slamming a spinning wheel kick into the side of the head—Standing Ovation—and the impact drops the champion to one knee near center ring.

John Phillips: "Standing Ovation!"

Troy doesn't back up this time.

They step in immediately, grab Susanita by the wrist, and haul her up just enough to turn her into Center Stage, the discus lariat crashing across the champion's chest and jaw and nearly flipping her inside out.

Mark Bravo: "Center Stage! Good Lord!"

John Phillips: "Susanita got crushed!"

The champion spills toward the ropes, somehow not all the way down, hands grabbing the middle strand to keep herself upright. The crowd is screaming now, half in horror, half in support, willing her to stay alive one second longer.

Troy stalks in behind her.

No wasted motion.

No smile.

Just the finish.

They pull Susanita away from the ropes, hook her, and lift her high once more for Final Bow.

This time there is no elbow escape.

No twist out.

No last-second counter.

Troy holds her there for the briefest heartbeat, then drives her down with the sit-out powerbomb dead-center in the ring.

John Phillips: "FINAL BOW AGAIN!"

Mark Bravo: "That one landed clean!"

Troy stacks the champion up deep and hooks both legs with everything they have left.

Referee: "One! Two! Three!"

DING DING DING!

John Phillips: "Troy Lindz has done it!"

Mark Bravo: "We have a new United States Champion!"

The CHI Health Center erupts into a storm of noise as Troy releases the cover and falls backward to a seated position, breathing hard, eyes wide, not in shock exactly, but in the kind of deep realization that only comes when the fight is finally over and the result is real.

Susanita remains down on the mat, chest rising and falling, the effort of the defense finally catching up to her. She gave everything. She survived everything except the very last sequence.

Ring Announcer: "Here is your winner... and the NEW United States Champion..."

Ring Announcer: "TROY LINDZ!"

John Phillips: "What a performance by Troy Lindz."

Mark Bravo: "And what a fight from Susanita too. But tonight, Troy's transformation paid off in gold."

The referee retrieves the United States Championship and brings it over. Troy takes the title with both hands and just stares at it for a second, breathing hard, sweat pouring, braid hanging loose now around the face. No pose yet. No grand gesture.

Just a look.

A long, hard look at the championship they came here to take.

John Phillips: "This is what Eli Creed promised."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. Break. Bend. Build. And tonight, whether you like it or not, Troy Lindz just made the Creed Method look real dangerous."

Troy slowly rises to their feet with the title in hand and finally lifts it overhead as the crowd continues to roar, some in support, some in disbelief, all of them understanding the same thing:

The challenger came alone.

The challenger came changed.

And the challenger walks out champion.

For Your Sake

Segment

The scene cuts backstage.

A monitor glows in the corner of a quiet hallway alcove, still replaying the final image from the United States Championship match. Troy Lindz stands with the title. Susanita Ybanez is down. The story has already changed.

Marie Van Claudio stands in front of the screen, arms folded tightly across herself, eyes locked on the image even though she clearly wishes it were something else.

She does not look shocked.

She looks disappointed.

Not in the theatrical sense.

Not in the petty sense.

In the quiet, personal way someone looks when they just watched a woman they respect lose something that mattered.

John Phillips: "Marie Van Claudio watching what just happened to Susanita Ybanez."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and that look says plenty. She didn't like seeing that one bit."

Marie exhales slowly through her nose, never taking her eyes off the screen. There's tension in her jaw. In her shoulders. In the way her fingers curl against her own arms as if she is holding herself together by force instead of instinct.

Then a hand settles gently onto her shoulder.

Marie's head turns immediately.

And there he is.

Eli Creed.

Calm.

Composed.

That same unbearable softness in the eyes that somehow always makes him feel more invasive, not less.

Eli Creed: "Grief is a strange thing."

Marie pulls her shoulder away from his hand almost instantly.

Marie Van Claudio: "Take that somewhere else."

Eli is not offended.

Of course he isn't.

He folds his hands in front of himself and looks at the monitor instead, as though the two of them are simply sharing an observation rather than standing on the edge of a confrontation.

Eli Creed: "You see disappointment."

Eli Creed: "Loss."

Eli Creed: "Something taken that should have remained where it was."

Marie turns her body fully toward him now.

Her face is tight.

Her patience even tighter.

Marie Van Claudio: "I said take it somewhere else."

Eli Creed: "And I heard you."

Eli Creed: "But sometimes what we want furthest from ourselves..."

Eli Creed: "Is exactly what we are most in need of hearing."

Mark Bravo: "God, he talks like every sentence comes with incense and a warning label."

John Phillips: "And Marie looks like she is about one more line away from slapping him."

Marie takes one step closer, not intimidated, not charmed, not interested in being handled.

Marie Van Claudio: "You have a lot of nerve putting your hands on me after what your little project just did out there."

Eli's expression never changes.

Eli Creed: "Troy Lindz did not win because of me."

Eli Creed: "Troy won because Troy accepted what pain was trying to teach."

Marie Van Claudio: "And there it is."

Marie Van Claudio: "The sermon."

Marie Van Claudio: "You really do think people are dying to be saved by you."

Eli Creed: "No."

Eli Creed: "I think they are dying because they refuse it."

That hangs there for a beat.

Marie actually lets out the faintest disbelieving laugh, but there is no warmth in it.

Marie Van Claudio: "You know what I love most about men like you?"

Marie Van Claudio: "You always mistake composure for wisdom."

Marie Van Claudio: "You think because you speak softly, you're saying something important."

Eli tilts his head just slightly.

Eli Creed: "And you mistake fury for strength."

That lands.

Not because she agrees.

Because it is targeted well enough to irritate her.

Eli Creed: "Anger is intoxicating."

Eli Creed: "Aggression too."

Eli Creed: "They feel powerful in the moment."

Eli Creed: "They feel righteous."

Eli Creed: "They feel like fuel."

Eli Creed: "But most often..."

Eli Creed: "They are just shortcuts to collapse."

Marie stares at him.

The mention of what comes later tonight is not spoken yet, but it is there anyway, waiting in the room like another person listening.

John Phillips: "Now he's getting to the real point."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, this isn't about Susanita anymore. This is about Amy Harrison. This is about Marie's match later tonight."

Eli Creed: "And in situations like the one you are about to face..."

Eli Creed: "That is worth remembering."

Marie's eyes narrow.

Marie Van Claudio: "You really think I need advice from you before I walk into the biggest match of my night?"

Eli Creed: "No."

Eli Creed: "I think you need warning."

Eli Creed: "There is a difference."

He steps just a little closer, not crowding her, not threatening her, just forcing the words to land without distance to soften them.

Eli Creed: "You are emotional tonight."

Eli Creed: "You are carrying history, ego, grief, and pride into a fight where all four can be used against you."

Eli Creed: "And if you let anger make your choices..."

Eli Creed: "Amy Harrison will not have to beat you."

Eli Creed: "You will do it for her."

Marie takes another step in, bringing them nearly face to face now.

Marie Van Claudio: "Then I guess it's a good thing I've been doing this long enough to know the difference between anger..."

Marie Van Claudio: "And hunger."

Eli actually smiles faintly at that.

Eli Creed: "Perhaps."

Eli Creed: "But one has a way of dressing up as the other when the stakes are high."

Marie looks back to the monitor for just a second, where the replay has looped again to the image of Susanita down and Troy holding gold. When she speaks next, her voice is lower.

Marie Van Claudio: "You should be very careful tonight, Eli."

He says nothing.

Marie Van Claudio: "Because if that smug little lesson of yours starts spreading too far..."

Marie Van Claudio: "Somebody's eventually going to decide you're the one who needs correcting."

Eli does not rise to it.

Eli Creed: "That would be their pain talking."

Marie smirks now.

Not amused.

Predatory.

Marie Van Claudio: "No."

Marie Van Claudio: "That would be mine."

For the first time in the segment, Eli gives her a long look in return. Not flustered. Not shaken. Just measuring.

Eli Creed: "Then I hope, for your sake..."

Eli Creed: "You know how to use it better than Susanita did."

That's the one.

The line that pushes just far enough.

Marie's jaw tightens again, but she doesn't lunge. Doesn't shout. Doesn't give him the explosion he may very well be standing here to provoke.

Instead, she smiles.

And somehow that feels far more dangerous.

Marie Van Claudio: "Get out of my way."

Eli steps aside without resistance.

Marie walks past him without another word, shoulders squared, anger still there, but now wrapped tight around purpose instead of spilling out wild. Eli watches her go, hands folded, expression unreadable.

John Phillips: "What a strange encounter that was."

Mark Bravo: "Strange? That felt like somebody striking a match in a room already full of gas."

The camera lingers on Eli Creed for one final second as he turns and looks back at the monitor, where Troy Lindz still stands with the championship, before the scene fades.

World Tour: Leg One

Segment

The screen fades to black.

A low rumble builds beneath the silence.

Then a single spotlight cuts across the darkness.

Then another.

Then another.

Quick flashes begin to hit the screen.

Sold out arenas.

Fans with flags raised high.

Championship belts glinting beneath stage lights.

Wrestlers staring each other down.

Airplanes on runways.

City lights at night.

Maps stretching across oceans.

John Phillips: "The next chapter of UTA is almost here."

Mark Bravo: "And this ain't just a road trip. This is a statement."

The music swells.

The UTA logo hits the screen in bright gold over a black backdrop.

John Phillips: "After Victorious..."

Mark Bravo: "The world tour begins."

The beat kicks harder now as the video cuts to sweeping skyline shots.

Mexico City traffic and neon.

Turin at dusk.

Strasbourg lit against the night.

Lisbon overlooking the water.

Madrid alive and loud.

Then London.

Bigger.

Wider.

Waiting.

John Phillips: "One company."

Mark Bravo: "One roster."

John Phillips: "One mission."

Mark Bravo: "To take UTA global in a way only UTA can."

The package begins running through the dates, each city introduced with big bold graphics and roaring crowd sound underneath.

MEXICO '26

May 1, 2026

Gimnasio Olimpico — Mexico City, Mexico, CMX

Quick cuts of lucha masks in the crowd. Fans pounding barricades. The ring lit in red, green, and white.

John Phillips: "It starts in Mexico City."

Mark Bravo: "You wanna talk passion? You wanna talk noise? You better be ready, because Mexico's gonna bring all of it."

ITALY '26

May 8, 2026

Inalpi Arena — Turin, Piedmont Region, Italy, TO

The footage turns cinematic. Elegant buildings. Fast crowd cuts. Wrestlers walking hallways in slow motion.

John Phillips: "Then UTA rolls into Turin."

Mark Bravo: "Different energy. Same violence."

FRANCE '26

May 15, 2026

Zénith de Strasbourg — Strasbourg, France

The screen flashes between the French skyline and hard strikes in the ring.

John Phillips: "France gets its turn next."

Mark Bravo: "And by then, this tour's gonna have momentum behind it. That's when stuff starts getting dangerous."

PORTUGAL '26

May 22, 2026

MEO Arena — Lisbon, Portugal

Sunlit city shots mix with crowd shots and championship close-ups.

John Phillips: "From there, Lisbon."

Mark Bravo: "Beautiful city. Brutal night."

SPAIN '26

May 29, 2026

Palacio Vistalegre Madrid — Madrid, Spain

The pace of the package picks up even more now, the music hitting harder with every cut.

John Phillips: "Madrid on May twenty-ninth."

Mark Bravo: "By the time we hit Spain, everybody's gonna know exactly what kind of war this tour has become."

The music drops for one dramatic beat.

The screen goes black again.

Then one final city appears.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIR: 2026

June 6, 2026

The O2 — London, UK

The screen explodes into gold and white.

The biggest crowd shots yet.

The biggest arena yet.

The grandest scale yet.

John Phillips: "And it all leads to London."

Mark Bravo: "International Affair. The O2. June sixth. That's not just another stop. That's the crown jewel of leg one."

Now the package turns from locations to emotion.

Champions walking with gold.

Rivals colliding in split-screen.

Locker room shots.

Tape going around wrists.

Close-ups of bruises.

Fans chanting in different languages.

The message is clear:

This is bigger than one city.

Bigger than one show.

Bigger than one country.

John Phillips: "New crowds."

Mark Bravo: "New countries."

John Phillips: "New stages."

Mark Bravo: "Same UTA."

The logo hits again.

Fast cuts continue behind it.

Fists flying.

Titles raised.

Fans screaming.

Planes taking off.

John Phillips: "The world is next."

Mark Bravo: "And after Victorious, UTA is coming for it."

LEG ONE OF THE WORLD TOUR

MEXICO CITY

TURIN

STRASBOURG

LISBON

MADRID

LONDON

UTA WORLD TOUR: LEG ONE

BEGINS MAY 1, 2026

The package ends on the UTA logo as the music hits one final hard note and cuts to black.

Six Man Tag

Segment

The screen fades to black.

A low, distorted hum builds underneath the silence.

Then—

A flash of gold.

The UTA Championship.

Maxwell Jett holding it.

Smiling.

Smug.

Unbothered.

John Phillips: "It started with betrayal."

Mark Bravo: "And then it got worse."

The footage cuts sharp and fast.

Chris Ross, UTA Champion.

Maxwell Jett, running his mouth.

The title on the line.

The ending.

Jett wins.

Jett becomes champion.

Ross loses everything he had worked months to keep.

John Phillips: "On Victory, Maxwell Jett took the UTA Championship from Chris Ross."

Mark Bravo: "And he didn't just beat him. He made sure Ross felt every second of it."

The package slows.

Jett in the ring with a microphone.

That rotten grin on his face.

The crowd already boiling before he even gets to the point.

Then the line.

Valentina Blaze.

Lauren.

The picture.

The cruelty.

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett made it personal in the ugliest way possible."

Mark Bravo: "No, he made it sacred. Then he spit on it."

The music under the package gets darker now.

Chris Ross backstage.

Throwing chairs.

Flipping tables.

Screaming for Maxwell Jett.

Red-eyed. Breathing hard. Gone somewhere past reason.

Chris Ross: "WHERE IS HE?!"

John Phillips: "Chris Ross snapped."

Mark Bravo: "And can you blame him?"

More cuts.

Ross in the ring.

Ross at commentary.

Ross flipping the desk.

Ross screaming that Valentina is hurt.

Ross daring Maxwell Jett to come out.

Security swarming.

Ross cutting through them like they were never there.

John Phillips: "Ross wasn't looking for a rematch."

Mark Bravo: "He was looking for blood."

The screen flashes again.

A quieter hallway.

Chris Ross alone.

Then Ace Andrews appears.

Samuel Scythe behind him.

Still.

Terrifying.

John Phillips: "And just when it looked like Ross was all alone in his rage..."

Mark Bravo: "The Reapers found each other."

Ace talking.

Smooth. Poisonous. Calm.

Samuel Scythe standing like murder with a pulse.

Ross listening.

Not agreeing.

Not denying.

Just listening.

John Phillips: "Ace Andrews made it clear that Samuel Scythe wanted the same thing Ross wanted."

Mark Bravo: "Justice. Or at least their version of it."

Then the package explodes back into chaos.

Jett arriving in the building.

Suit on. Belt over the shoulder. That same stupid confidence.

Scott Stevens trying to warn him.

Jett laughing it off.

The locker room door opening.

The crash from inside.

Samuel Scythe with a hand around Maxwell Jett's throat.

Chris Ross charging into the room.

The Rich Young GRAPPLRZ arriving.

Jacoby Jacobs.

Darran Darrington.

Bodies flying.

Lockers rattling.

Officials swarming.

John Phillips: "Then all hell broke loose."

Mark Bravo: "Too many egos. Too much violence. Not enough room."

The package lingers on the six key faces.

Chris Ross.

Samuel Scythe.

Maxwell Jett.

Jacoby Jacobs.

Darran Darrington.

Scott Stevens in the middle of the whole mess, already regretting whatever he's about to say.

Scott Stevens: "At Victorious... you three... and you two... do this crap in the ring."

The music pulses harder now.

The words hit the screen in giant letters:

MAXWELL JETT

JACOBY JACOBS

DARRAN DARRINGTON

VS.

CHRIS ROSS

SAMUEL SCYTHER

???

John Phillips: "Scott Stevens made the match!"

Mark Bravo: "Three on three. And if Ross and Scythe had a third man..."

John Phillips: "Bring him."

The package now shifts into hard visual contrasts.

Jett sneering with the UTA Championship over his shoulder.

Ross glaring like a man who wants the title less than he wants revenge.

Jacoby and Darran grinning like this is all a joke.

Samuel Scythe saying nothing because he doesn't need words.

The whole thing framed not as a wrestling match...

But as an explosion waiting for a bell.

John Phillips: "This is bigger than titles now."

Mark Bravo: "No doubt. This is pride, rage, humiliation, revenge... and somewhere in the middle of all that, Maxwell Jett still thinks he's the star of the show."

The champion appears on screen again.

Perfect suit.

Perfect hair.

Perfect smile.

Then Ross.

Sweating.

Foaming.

Chair in hand.

Nothing perfect about him at all.

Just dangerous.

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett wants to stand at the center of this company."

Mark Bravo: "But Chris Ross doesn't care about centers anymore. He just wants to tear Jett apart."

Samuel Scythe fills the screen next.

Dead-eyed.

Silent.

Massive.

And then Jacoby and Darran again, all expensive swagger and bad intentions.

John Phillips: "One side brings ego, numbers, and the UTA Championship."

Mark Bravo: "The other side brings pain, violence, and one unanswered question."

The screen goes black.

One by one the names hit again.

CHRIS ROSS

SAMUEL SCYTHER

AND A PARTNER TO BE REVEALED...

Then—

MAXWELL JETT

THE RICH YOUNG GRAPPLERZ

Then all six faces flash fast across the screen in rhythm with the music.

John Phillips: "What happens when ego meets vengeance?"

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

The music drops out for one final beat.

Then the graphic slams onto the screen.

UP NEXT

SIX-MAN TAG TEAM WAR

The package ends on Chris Ross and Maxwell Jett locked in a split-screen stare, with Samuel Scythe motionless

beneath one side and the Rich Young GRAPPLRZ grinning beneath the other.

The question remains hanging in the air:

Who is the third man?

Chris Ross/Samuel Scythe/TBD vs. Maxwell "Max" Jett/Jacoby Jacobs/Darran Darrington

Match

The arena goes dark.

Then a single gold spotlight ignites at the top of the stage like a red-carpet flash.

The opening riff of Maxwell Jett's music hits, cocky arena rock crashing into heavy trap drums, and the CHI Health Center immediately drowns the entranceway in boos.

John Phillips: "And here they come."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and they've got a name now. First Class. Which is hilarious, because every single thing about these three screams turbulence."

Maxwell Jett steps through the curtain first, and of course he does it like the world has been waiting for him personally. Designer robe. UTA Championship around his waist. Chin up. Smirk in place. He doesn't walk out like a man entering a fight. He walks out like a man attending his own coronation.

But tonight he is not alone.

Flanking him on either side are Jacoby Jacobs and Darran Darrington, the newly-minted running mates of the UTA Champion. The Rich Young GRAPPLRZ step out in coordinated arrogance, expensive streetwear turned ring-ready, both men carrying themselves like they think they just got upgraded from supporting cast to prime-time players.

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett, Jacoby Jacobs, and Darran Darrington coming out together for the first time as an official unit."

Mark Bravo: "And look at them. They ain't just coming out as partners. They're coming out like they think they own the whole company."

Jett pauses beneath the spotlight and slowly spreads his arms, drinking in the hatred with that same poisonous confidence that only seems to grow the louder the crowd gets. Jacoby grins beside him and talks trash toward the hard camera. Darran nods to himself and points toward the ring like he's already picturing the bodies left behind when this thing is over.

John Phillips: "This is a dangerous mix. Maxwell Jett is already insufferable on his own. Add two men happy to do his dirty work, and now you have a very real problem."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because Jett's the mouth. Jacoby's the spark. Darran's the guy who starts feelin' brave when there's numbers. Put it together and you get a group that's real easy to hate and real hard to ignore."

The three begin walking down the ramp together, perfectly comfortable in the venom coming from the crowd. Jett takes the center lane, naturally. Jacoby keeps jawing at fans near the barricade, laughing like every insult being thrown at him is a compliment. Darran talks over his shoulder at the ringside cameras, clearly enjoying the chance to be attached to something bigger now that Maxwell Jett has declared them his associates.

And Jett?

Jett acts like this was always the plan.

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett has wasted absolutely no time making this title reign about power, influence, and

expanding his reach."

Mark Bravo: "That's because he doesn't just want to be champion. He wants to be the center of gravity. He wants the whole locker room to bend around him."

Halfway down the ramp, Jett stops dead center and raises one hand. Jacoby and Darran stop with him. For one second the whole entrance freezes like a photo shoot, Jett in the middle with the title, his two allies standing just behind his shoulders like bodyguards at a red-carpet event gone rotten.

The boos only get louder.

Mark Bravo: "Oh, look at this. He's got them posed now. Of course he does."

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett treats every second of screen time like it belongs in a highlight package."

Jett slowly motions for the camera to come in closer. When it does, he leans toward the lens with that infuriating little grin and pats the UTA Championship twice before throwing a smug glance toward the ring.

John Phillips: "That title means everything to him."

Mark Bravo: "No. Let me fix that. That title means everything about him to him."

They resume the walk.

Jett takes his time, naturally, while Jacoby and Darran continue soaking in the atmosphere around him. The whole thing feels less like a wrestling entrance and more like three rich punks walking into a place they think they can buy, but the uglier truth beneath it is this:

They can fight too.

And tonight, they only need to be a little more coordinated than chaos to make life hell for Chris Ross and Samuel Scythe.

John Phillips: "You have to wonder whether this confidence holds once Ross and Scythe come out."

Mark Bravo: "Maybe not. But right now? Right now these three think they've already won the mind game."

The trio reaches ringside and spreads out naturally. Jett circles toward the steel steps while Jacoby and Darran peel off to either side of the ring, both throwing little comments toward the crowd and each other like they're trying to outdo one another in arrogance.

Jett stops at the base of the steps and turns, looking back at both men with a subtle nod. Not gratitude. Not camaraderie.

Approval.

Like a king checking whether his court has arrived in proper order.

John Phillips: "There is something very deliberate about this presentation."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. Jett wants this to feel official. Bigger than a one-night partnership. Bigger than convenience."

Jett climbs the steps first and wipes his boots carefully on the apron, dragging the act out with all the arrogance in the world. Jacoby slides onto the apron on one side. Darran climbs up on the other. All three enter the ring together.

Once inside, Maxwell Jett heads straight for the center while Jacoby and Darran take opposite corners, giving him the visual he wants: champion in the middle, allies on either side, all eyes where they belong.

Jett slowly unfastens the championship from his waist and raises it high overhead.

The boos rain down like a storm.

John Phillips: "There they are. First Class."

Mark Bravo: "And if you're Chris Ross and Samuel Scythe, you better have a real answer for this. Because Maxwell Jett didn't just bring backup tonight. He brought an attitude, a title, and two guys dumb enough to feel invincible standing next to him."

Jett lowers the title and smirks toward the stage while Jacoby barks something off-mic at the entranceway and Darran pounds a fist into his palm, all three men now waiting for the storm they know is coming.

The lights in the CHI Health Center drop all at once.

Not to dramatic color.

Not to spectacle.

To darkness.

Complete, swallowing darkness.

For one beat, the arena is silent.

Then the titantron flickers.

A scythe blade cuts across a dead field.

The words REAP WHAT YOU SOW flash across the screen in jagged white letters.

And then the opening of "Useless Sacrifice" crashes through the building.

John Phillips: "And here comes Samuel Scythe."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and if First Class strutted out here like this was a red carpet, Scythe's about to make it feel like a funeral march."

A single cold spotlight falls onto the stage.

Samuel Scythe stands in the center of it.

Hood up.

Head lowered.

Shoulders tight.

Motionless.

He does not pose.

He does not look at the crowd.

He does not acknowledge the noise coming from the ring where Maxwell Jett, Jacoby Jacobs, and Darran Darrington wait for him.

He simply stands there like something summoned.

John Phillips: "Every time Samuel Scythe enters, it feels less like an entrance and more like an arrival."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. He doesn't come out here like a wrestler. He comes out here like the consequence."

Then a second figure steps into view behind him.

Ace Andrews.

Immaculate suit.

Measured smile.

Hands relaxed at his sides.

Every bit as composed as Scythe is menacing.

John Phillips: "And of course, Ace Andrews is with him."

Mark Bravo: "That man always looks like he knows the ending before the match even starts. I hate that."

Ace stops just behind Scythe, half a step back, the picture of complete confidence in the monster he has unleashed into UTA. He says something quietly out of the side of his mouth that the cameras do not pick up.

Scythe never responds.

Then, finally, Samuel lifts his head.

The crowd noise changes.

Not because it gets louder.

Because it gets meaner.

There is fear in it now.

Unease.

Recognition.

John Phillips: "Samuel Scythe has done nothing since arriving in UTA but leave a trail of wreckage behind him."

Mark Bravo: "And tonight he gets to aim that wreckage at Maxwell Jett and his new little country club."

Scythe starts walking.

Slowly.

Heavily.

Deliberately.

Every step down the ramp lands like it means something. There is no wasted motion in him. No wasted glance. His eyes stay fixed on the ring the entire time, on the three men already inside it, with a focus so cold it almost feels mechanical.

John Phillips: "No showmanship. No wasted movement. All focus."

Mark Bravo: "And look in that ring. Even First Class ain't running their mouths quite as much now."

The camera cuts inside the ropes.

Maxwell Jett still wears the smirk, but it is tighter now. More performative. Jacoby and Darran stand at either side of him, still trying to project arrogance, but their attention is fully locked on the stage. The energy has changed.

Because Samuel Scythe changes energy when he walks into a room.

Or an arena.

John Phillips: "There is no question that Samuel Scythe's presence forces the issue physically in a match like this."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because if Jett wants control and if Jacoby and Darran wanna feel slick, Scythe is the exact kind of guy who can ruin all that by just putting his hands on somebody one time."

Scythe reaches ringside and stops at the foot of the steel steps.

He looks up at the ring.

At Jett.

At the title.

At the two men beside him.

Then up the steps he goes.

No hurry.

No hesitation.

Ace follows him, calm as ever, climbing only once Scythe has reached the apron. Andrews keeps his posture clean and composed, but his eyes are alive, moving from the ring to the stage to the crowd and back again, a billionaire snake surveying the room while his Reaper stalks the prey.

John Phillips: "Ace Andrews always looks most comfortable when the situation is on the verge of becoming a disaster."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because if there's chaos, he usually thinks he can steer it."

Scythe steps through the ropes.

Once inside, he walks to the center of the ring and reaches up with both hands.

He pulls the hood back.

The crowd roars.

Samuel turns his head slowly toward the hard camera.

Then drags his thumb across his throat in one cold, deliberate motion.

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. I don't love that. Not one bit."

John Phillips: "A chilling statement from Samuel Scythe before this six-man tag has even officially begun."

Ace stays at ringside, one hand lightly resting on the apron now, the other tucked near his jacket button, wearing the kind of faint smile that says he is exactly where he wants to be.

Inside the ring, Scythe backs into his corner without taking his eyes off First Class.

The stage is set for the next arrival.

John Phillips: "Samuel Scythe is here."

Mark Bravo: "And now the question becomes simple. Who in the world is walking out here to complete his team with Chris Ross?"

The lights don't shift much this time.

They don't need to.

The energy in the building is already wrong.

Samuel Scythe is in the ring.

Ace Andrews is at ringside.

First Class is waiting across from them, trying to look relaxed, trying to look smug, trying to look like this is still their show.

Then "Black Flame" hits.

The CHI Health Center erupts.

John Phillips: "Here he comes."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, but hold on a second—where's the third man?"

Chris Ross storms through the curtain.

Alone.

No pause.

No pose.

No effort to acknowledge the crowd.

He looks exactly like he has looked all night.

Furious.

Unstable.

Like the only thing keeping him upright is the promise that Maxwell Jett is somewhere in front of him.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross is out here by himself!"

Mark Bravo: "That's what I'm sayin'! Where is the third man? Is there even a third man?"

Ross marches down the ramp with that same broken, violent purpose he carried earlier in the night. Jaw clenched. Eyes red. Shoulders tight. He does not look like a man coming to wrestle a match.

He looks like a man coming to settle something.

John Phillips: "If there is a plan here, Chris Ross is not showing any sign of it."

Mark Bravo: "No, because he may not care about the plan. He may only care about getting his hands on Maxwell Jett."

The camera cuts to the ring.

Samuel Scythe stands in his corner, still as stone, but even he seems to angle his head just slightly as Ross comes out alone.

Ace Andrews narrows his eyes at ringside.

Inside the opposite corner, Maxwell Jett's smirk returns a little wider now. Jacoby Jacobs and Darran Darrington start pointing toward the stage and laughing, more than happy to enjoy the apparent numbers advantage if this is really about to become three-on-two.

John Phillips: "You can see First Class realizing the same thing we are."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and they like what they think they're seeing."

Ross reaches the midpoint of the ramp and never slows down. He doesn't play to the cameras. Doesn't gesture to the crowd. Doesn't even look at Scythe. His eyes are locked on Jett from the second he comes through the curtain.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross has had one target all night."

Mark Bravo: "And it has never changed. Maxwell Jett. Not the title. Not the spotlight. Just Maxwell Jett."

As Ross gets closer to ringside, the atmosphere tightens again. The audience can feel it. They can feel the uncertainty hanging over the match now.

Is there a third man?

Was there ever one?

Or did Chris Ross come out here ready to fight a war short-handed if that's what it takes to get a piece of the champion?

John Phillips: "Scott Stevens said if they had a third, bring him."

Mark Bravo: "Right. But Ross didn't say he had one. Ace didn't say he had one. Scythe didn't say a damn thing. So what are we looking at here?"

Ross reaches ringside and veers straight for the apron, never taking his eyes off the ring. He grabs the top rope and steps up in one hard motion, then climbs through the ropes like a man forcing his way into a fight that should have started ten minutes ago.

The second he enters, the temperature changes again.

Because now he is in there.

Now the danger is no longer approaching.

It is present.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross is in the ring."

Mark Bravo: "And he still came alone."

Ross doesn't go to his corner right away.

He takes two steps in.

Then three.

Just enough to make Jett stop smiling for a second.

Scythe shifts in his corner, ready.

Ace watches from the floor.

Jacoby and Darran stop jawing quite so much.

Ross and Jett lock eyes.

John Phillips: "No third man yet."

Mark Bravo: "And the longer this goes without one, the more I start wondering if Chris Ross even cares."

Finally, Ross backs into his team's corner, but only barely. He is not settling in. He is not conserving himself. He is only waiting because the bell or the next interruption demands it.

John Phillips: "So now the question hangs over all of this—does Chris Ross have a partner coming?"

Mark Bravo: "Or are Ross and Scythe about to walk into this thing two against three because hatred matters more than math?"

The camera lingers on the full scene.

First Class in one corner.

Samuel Scythe and Chris Ross in the other.

Ace Andrews watching closely from the floor.

And one giant unanswered question still hanging over Victorious.

Where is the third man?

"Black Flame" continues to roar through the building as Chris Ross steps through the ropes and into the ring, but he does not head calmly to the corner this time.

He stomps.

Back and forth.

Across the ring like a caged lion that has smelled blood and no longer understands why metal and ropes are still standing between him and the thing he wants to tear apart.

John Phillips: "Look at Chris Ross."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, that man is not pacing. That man is hunting."

Ross's jaw is clenched so tight the muscles in his face are twitching. His fists open and close at his sides. Every few steps he jerks his head back toward Maxwell Jett, glaring with the kind of fury that makes the whole thing feel unstable before a single legal strike has been thrown.

In the opposite corner, First Class is still trying to project confidence, but the sight of Ross stomping around like this pulls some of the shine off it. Maxwell Jett talks out of the side of his mouth, trying to keep the arrogance alive. Jacoby Jacobs smirks. Darran Darrington barks something toward the other side of the ring.

But Ross does not care about any of them equally.

He cares about Jett.

Only Jett.

John Phillips: "There is still no sign of a third partner."

Mark Bravo: "Nope. And now the referee's gotta ask the question."

The referee steps toward Ross's side of the ring, one hand half-raised, trying to restore some kind of order before this six-man tag becomes something else entirely. He looks from Chris Ross to Samuel Scythe, then toward the stage, then back again.

Referee: "Chris! Chris, hold on! Is there a third man or not?"

Ross barely even looks at him.

He just keeps stomping.

One pass.

Then another.

Breathing hard.

Boiling.

Finally he turns just enough to bark at the official.

Chris Ross: "Start the damn match."

John Phillips: "Chris Ross does not care."

Mark Bravo: "No, he does not care about strategy, numbers, introductions, nothin'. He wants the bell."

The referee looks toward the stage again anyway, still expecting... something.

Someone.

But nothing happens.

No music.

No movement behind the curtain.

No dramatic reveal.

No third man.

John Phillips: "It looks like no one else is coming."

Mark Bravo: "I think you're right. I think Chris Ross is done waiting, and if there was gonna be a partner, we would've seen him by now."

Ross slaps his hands together once and takes two more hard steps toward center ring before Samuel Scythe reaches out and plants a hand lightly against his chest from the corner, not to calm him, not really, but to keep him from detonating too early. Even that touch barely slows him.

He is all aggression.

All impatience.

All bad intent.

John Phillips: "This has become very real for Team Ross and Scythe."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because unless somebody comes flying out here in the next five seconds, this thing is three-on-two, and Chris Ross still does not give a damn."

The referee backs toward the middle and glances one last time toward the stage, clearly hoping for something to save the structure of this match.

Nothing comes.

Meanwhile Ross is done pretending to wait. He points across the ring straight at Maxwell Jett.

Chris Ross: "Ring the bell."

The crowd roars because now it feels official.

No one else is coming.

No cavalry.

No surprise.

Just Chris Ross, still furious enough to bite through steel, Samuel Scythe beside him, and a numbers disadvantage he appears more than willing to fight through if it means finally getting his hands on Maxwell Jett.

John Phillips: "It appears we are going to start this match with Chris Ross and Samuel Scythe outnumbered."

Mark Bravo: "And somehow that doesn't make me feel better for First Class. It makes me feel worse."

The referee looks once more between both sides.

Ross stomps in place, practically daring anyone to delay this any longer.

Across the ring, Maxwell Jett slowly grins again, but now even that grin looks a little thinner with Chris Ross staring through him like a man already picking out where to leave the body.

The crowd is already on its feet before the referee can even fully signal for order.

Chris Ross is stomping in place in his corner, shoulders rolling, eyes locked dead ahead on Maxwell Jett. He looks like he might charge before the bell even gets permission to exist. Across from him, Jett is standing with that same smug grin, title-less now but somehow still carrying himself like the center of the room.

The CHI Health Center knows what this is supposed to be.

The clash.

The collision.

The first legal moment Chris Ross gets to put hands on the man he has wanted all night.

John Phillips: "This is it. Maxwell Jett and Chris Ross are starting this thing."

Mark Bravo: "And that is exactly what this crowd wants to see. More importantly, it's exactly what Chris Ross wants to feel."

The referee looks to both corners, gets the nod from First Class, gets something far less formal from Ross and Scythe, and calls for the bell.

DING DING DING!

The building erupts.

Ross surges one step forward immediately, hands flexing, jaw tight, the first legal second of this match already feeling like it might come apart at the seams.

Jett does not move forward.

Of course he doesn't.

He just looks at Ross.

Smiles.

And then reaches back.

John Phillips: "Oh no."

Mark Bravo: "You knew he was gonna do somethin' like this."

Without ever taking his eyes off Chris Ross, Maxwell Jett leans back and tags out to Jacoby Jacobs.

The boos are instant.

Loud.

Angry.

Disappointed in exactly the way Jett loves most.

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett just tagged out!"

Mark Bravo: "And listen to this place! They wanted Jett and Ross, and Max just yanked the plate off the table before anybody could eat."

Jett backs away into the corner with a grin that only grows wider as Jacoby steps through the ropes, full of himself, full of noise, full of borrowed confidence because he knows the heat in the building just got redirected straight into him.

Ross freezes for one beat in the center of the ring.

Not confused.

Offended.

He stares across at Jett, who simply shrugs and mouths something smug from the apron.

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett is denying Chris Ross what he wants again."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because that's who he is. He will take the crowd's hope, take Ross's rage, and twist both of 'em if it buys him one cheap little advantage."

Jacoby claps his hands once and starts bouncing in place, talking fast, jawing at Ross, trying to make this his moment now that Jett has handed him the spotlight.

Jacoby Jacobs: "Ayo, big dog, this what you want? Huh? This what you get!"

Ross doesn't even look at him right away.

He's still glaring at Jett.

Still staring at the UTA Champion like the match itself is an inconvenience between now and the beating he still plans to deliver.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross is furious."

Mark Bravo: "And that's dangerous for Jacoby too, because now he's the body standing between Ross and the man Ross actually wants."

Finally, Ross turns.

And when he does, Jacoby's bravado suddenly looks a little less comfortable.

Because now he has all of Chris Ross' attention.

And none of it is friendly.

Ross takes one step forward.

Then another.

Slow.

Heavy.

Like he's deciding whether he should fight Jacoby or simply throw him into the cheap seats on principle.

John Phillips: "Jacoby wanted in. Well, now he's in."

Mark Bravo: "And the problem is, Ross may be angry enough that this poor idiot is about to pay retail for Maxwell Jett's sins."

In the corner, Jett settles against the ropes and smiles wider, perfectly happy with the chaos he has just created. Darran pounds the turnbuckle beside him, barking support. On the other apron, Samuel Scythe stands still as a gravestone, watching the whole thing with cold patience while Ace Andrews lingers on the floor, arms folded, eyes moving from Ross to Jett to Jacoby like he's already mapping where the first real collapse might come from.

Jacoby lifts his hands and tries to circle.

Ross doesn't.

Ross just keeps coming forward.

And the opening exchange is about to begin with the entire building still buzzing over the same truth:

Maxwell Jett escaped again.

But only for now.

Jacoby Jacobs keeps his hands up and tries to circle, still talking, still trying to convince himself and everybody else that getting tagged into this was a promotion and not a death sentence.

Jacoby Jacobs: "C'mon then! C'mon then!"

John Phillips: "Jacoby Jacobs doing a lot of talking here."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and that's usually a bad sign when the man across from you looks like Chris Ross does right now."

Ross keeps walking him down.

No wasted motion.

No circling.

No lockup attempt.

Just a straight-line advance, shoulders squared, breathing hard, eyes boiling with the kind of rage that makes every step look like it should come with a warning siren.

Jacoby finally decides to strike first.

He rushes in with a quick forearm, trying to catch Ross before the bigger man can fully plant.

Ross barely flinches.

Jacoby hits him.

Ross just stares at him.

John Phillips: "It didn't even move him!"

Mark Bravo: "Nope. And now Jacoby knows that was a mistake."

Jacoby tries another forearm, faster this time, with a little more panic behind it.

Ross eats that one too.

Then Chris Ross answers.

One short headbutt.

Right to the face.

Jacoby stumbles backward instantly, hands flying up, legs crossing awkwardly beneath him as he tries to stay upright.

John Phillips: "Headbutt by Ross!"

Mark Bravo: "That wasn't fancy. That was a message."

Ross charges in before Jacoby can recover and absolutely folds him in half with a body shot to the ribs. Jacobs gasps and lurches sideways, and Ross grabs him by the back of the head with one massive hand and hurls him into the nearest corner.

Jacoby hits hard and bounces out of the buckles into a waiting avalanche of violence.

Ross drives a clothesline into him.

Then another.

Then a third that nearly turns Jacoby inside out where he stands.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross is mauling him in that corner!"

Mark Bravo: "And this is exactly what we were talking about! Jacoby is paying for all the punishment Ross still wants to hand Maxwell Jett!"

On the apron, Jett starts shouting immediately.

Maxwell Jett: "Hey! Ref! Get him outta there! Five count! Use your eyes!"

Darran pounds the turnbuckle and yells for Jacoby to cover up, but Ross is already dragging Jacobs out of the corner and snapping him over with a brutal overhead belly-to-belly suplex that sends him skidding across the canvas.

John Phillips: "What a throw!"

Mark Bravo: "Ross isn't wrestling right now. He's venting."

Jacoby scrambles on hands and knees, trying to crawl toward his corner, trying to remember this was supposed to be a team advantage and not a live demonstration of what happens when you stand too close to a man's revenge. Ross stalks after him and clubs him across the upper back with a forearm so hard it sends Jacobs flat to the mat.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross giving him absolutely nothing!"

Ross grabs Jacoby again and hauls him up for a German suplex.

Then holds on.

He drags him up again.

Second German.

The crowd erupts.

Jacoby bounces off the second one and rolls weakly toward the ropes, now far more interested in survival than talking.

Mark Bravo: "Every suplex imaginable, baby. That's Ross. And Jacoby's learning it the hard way."

Ross rises and finally turns his head toward the First Class corner, glaring straight at Maxwell Jett while Jacoby lies crumpled near center ring. Jett, to his credit, does not look away. He just smirks back, but there is more tension in it now.

Ross points at him.

Chris Ross: "You next."

John Phillips: "Chris Ross making it very clear that this isn't enough. Not even close."

That one second of eye contact is enough for Jacoby to try something desperate. He lunges low from behind and wraps both arms around Ross' waist, trying to slow him down and maybe steal some control back for his team.

Ross doesn't even bother peeling the hands.

He just reaches down, grabs at the grip, and launches Jacoby over with a huge release back suplex that sends him crashing flat on the back of his shoulders.

John Phillips: "My God!"

Mark Bravo: "Jacoby tried to grab a bear from behind and found out what happens."

Ross drops down into the cover, finally, one forearm across the chest.

Referee: "One! Two!"

Darran Darrington charges into the ring and stomps Ross across the back to break it up.

John Phillips: "Darran in to make the save!"

The referee is on Darran Darrington immediately, shouting him back toward the apron and forcing him out of the ring before this turns into a full collapse five minutes early. Darran keeps barking, hands up, pretending innocence now that he's already done the job.

Referee: "Out! Out! Get back to your corner!"

Chris Ross rises from the broken pin attempt like a man personally insulted by the interruption. He turns toward Darran with murder in his eyes and takes one hard step in that direction, enough to make Darran think twice about lingering where he is.

John Phillips: "Ross looks ready to go through him too."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and Darran knows it. That cheap save bought Jacoby time, but it may've also bought Darran a problem."

On the mat, Jacoby Jacobs is crawling. Not strategically. Desperately. One hand out. Then the other. He drags himself inch by inch toward the First Class corner, still rattled from the suplexes, still feeling every bit of the beating Ross just laid across his body.

Ross sees it.

And instantly forgets Darran.

He turns back and storms after Jacoby again.

John Phillips: "Jacoby is in trouble if Ross gets there first."

Ross grabs him by the ankle and yanks him backward across the canvas, killing the crawl cold. Jacoby turns over onto his back with both hands up, trying to plead, trying to buy a second, trying to say something slick enough to save himself.

Jacoby Jacobs: "Ayo, hold up, hold up—"

Ross stomps him in the stomach before the sentence can finish.

Mark Bravo: "Nope. Talkin' time is over."

Jacoby rolls onto his side and coughs, and Ross drags him up again, then slams him face-first into the top turnbuckle in the neutral corner. One shot. Then a second. Then Ross rips him backward and levels him with a short-arm clothesline that spins him inside out.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross is turning this into exactly the kind of ugly fight he loves!"

Jacoby flops toward his own corner on instinct and finally, finally gets close enough to matter. Darran is reaching over the top rope now, shouting, pounding the turnbuckle, demanding the tag like his life depends on it. Maybe Jacoby's does too.

Darran Darrington: "Come on! Come on! Over here!"

Ross lunges to cut him off, but Jacoby dives the last foot and slaps the hand.

John Phillips: "He got it! He got the tag!"

Mark Bravo: "Barely, but he got it!"

Darran comes in hot, and unlike Jacoby, he doesn't waste time talking. He rushes straight at Ross with clubbing forearms, trying to catch him before he can reset and break this second man down too. Ross absorbs the first one, then another, then a third that finally drives him half a step backward toward center ring.

John Phillips: "Darran trying to change the pace here!"

Darran hits the ropes and comes back with a running shoulder block. Ross gives ground this time, but only just. Darran bounces off him and has to come back a second time, this one with a clothesline that finally rocks Ross enough to make the crowd buzz.

Mark Bravo: "That's the smart move. If you're Darran, don't let Ross stand still and start throwin' people around again."

Darran keeps the pressure on, landing another forearm and then another before whipping Ross toward the ropes. Ross rebounds. Darran drops his head too early.

Ross catches him in motion.

Snatches him up.

And plants him with a spinebuster that shakes the ring.

John Phillips: "SPINEBUSTER!"

Mark Bravo: "And just like that, Darran found out why you don't get careless with Chris Ross!"

The crowd comes alive as Ross gets back to his feet and turns toward his own corner for the first time, Samuel Scythe standing there with one hand extended and Ace Andrews watching like a man who knows the next shift in violence is his to authorize without ever saying a word.

John Phillips: "And now Ross may be thinking tag."

Mark Bravo: "And if he is, here comes a whole different kind of problem."

Ross looks at Scythe. Looks back at Darran. Looks across at Maxwell Jett on the apron, still safe for now, still talking from outside the legal exchange.

Then Ross drags Darran up by the back of the neck and mauls him with a right hand before finally backing toward his corner.

The tag is there if he wants it.

And First Class has already learned that even without Jett being legal, this match is getting dangerous fast.

Chris Ross grabs Darran Darrington by the back of the neck and drags him the last few feet, then turns and reaches out toward his own corner.

Samuel Scythe is right there.

Hand extended.

Ready.

Or so it seems.

John Phillips: "Ross is going for the tag!"

And then Scythe pulls his hand back.

The arena gasps.

Then erupts in boos.

John Phillips: "What?!"

Mark Bravo: "No! No way!"

Chris Ross freezes in place.

His head snaps toward Scythe.

His eyes go wide.

Not in hurt.

In disbelief.

Pure, stunned disbelief.

John Phillips: "Ross cannot believe what just happened!"

Darran is still half-draped against him from the drag, and Ross, without even looking down, violently throws him back to the canvas like a rag doll tossed aside by a man who has just discovered the real danger is no longer in front of him.

Now all of Chris Ross' focus is on Samuel Scythe.

And the crowd is raining boos.

Chris Ross: "What the hell are you doin'?!"

Scythe does not answer.

He does not blink.

He does not snarl.

He just gives Ross that same thousand-yard stare, cold and empty and impossible to read.

Mark Bravo: "Look at Scythe. No emotion. Nothin'. Just that dead look."

Ace Andrews hurries around the outside of the ring now, moving quickly for the first time all night, making his way toward Scythe's side as the volume in the building rises from angry to volcanic.

John Phillips: "Ace Andrews is moving over to him now!"

Ross takes one furious step toward the corner, still shouting, still trying to make sense of what just happened. Behind him, Darran Darrington is crawling, hands and knees, dragging himself inch by inch toward First Class' corner while the entire match threatens to tilt sideways.

Chris Ross: "What is this?! What's goin' on?!"

Scythe gives him nothing.

Then Samuel Scythe steps off the apron.

He drops to the floor.

The crowd boos even louder.

John Phillips: "Samuel Scythe has just stepped down to the floor!"

Mark Bravo: "He's leaving him! He is absolutely leaving Chris Ross out there!"

Ace meets him immediately at ringside, talking low and urgently now, but Scythe never turns his head. He just keeps staring toward the ring, toward Ross, toward the confusion and outrage he has created with one simple refusal.

Inside the ropes, Chris Ross looks ready to come apart.

He points toward the floor.

Points at Scythe.

Then at himself.

Chris Ross: "You gotta be kiddin' me!"

Darran is still crawling.

Still inching closer.

Still trying to survive long enough for this betrayal or abandonment or whatever it is to become First Class' opportunity.

John Phillips: "Darran Darrington is crawling toward the tag while Chris Ross is completely caught up in what just happened with Scythe!"

Mark Bravo: "And how do you blame him? How do you not lose focus when the man standing beside you all night suddenly decides he's not standin' beside you anymore?"

Ross stomps toward the ropes, screaming down at his supposed partner now while Samuel Scythe stands on the floor like a statue and Ace Andrews hovers at his shoulder, the billionaire whispering poison into an already poisoned situation.

John Phillips: "This is unbelievable."

Mark Bravo: "And I hate to say it, but this has happened to Chris Ross before. This feels a whole lot like when he and Maxx Mayhem won the tag titles, only for Mayhem to turn on Ross right after."

John Phillips: "That's exactly what this feels like! Chris Ross has been here before! Trust built on violence, then ripped away the second it becomes inconvenient."

Ross hears none of commentary, of course, but the look on his face says enough. This is not just anger anymore. This is recognition.

Recognition that the ground beneath him has shifted again.

Recognition that he may have been used.

Recognition that he may be standing in the ring alone after all.

Mark Bravo: "And what is Ace Andrews' ultimate goal here? Seriously. Why even interject yourself into Chris Ross' business? Why bring Samuel Scythe alongside him, offer 'justice,' talk about Reapers... just to leave Ross hangin' when the bell rings?"

John Phillips: "That's the question! Was this ever about helping Chris Ross? Or was it about positioning Samuel Scythe? Was it about control? Was it about proving Ace Andrews can turn chaos into leverage whenever he wants?"

Mark Bravo: "Whatever it is, Chris Ross is the one paying for it right now!"

And with Ross still shouting at Scythe, still demanding answers, Darran finally gets close enough to his corner to reach out.

Maxwell Jett is already there, hand extended, grinning from ear to ear as the whole thing comes apart in exactly the kind of elegant, rotten little way he loves most.

Chris Ross may have wanted a fight.

Instead, he just got abandoned in the middle of one.

And with Chris Ross still at the ropes, still shouting down at Samuel Scythe and Ace Andrews, First Class reacts fast.

Darran Darrington reaches the corner.

Jacoby Jacobs leans in.

And tags himself back into the match.

John Phillips: "It's Jacoby! Jacoby just tagged back in!"

Mark Bravo: "Smart move on paper. Get the fresh man in while Ross is distracted, while Ross is angry, while Ross is looking anywhere but at the legal man."

Jacoby steps through the ropes with a quick grin, clearly thinking this is the opening. Chris Ross is focused on the floor. Focused on Scythe. Focused on the betrayal. Focused on the wrong thing.

Jacoby rushes in from behind and clubs Ross across the upper back.

The shot lands.

Ross doesn't fall.

Jacoby hits him again.

Ross still doesn't fall.

John Phillips: "Ross isn't even moving!"

Mark Bravo: "Uh oh. Uh oh. I think Jacoby just realized something really bad."

Ross slowly turns around.

The look on his face is different now.

He was furious before.

Now he is something worse.

Because whatever faith or focus or structure he had left in this match has been ripped away, and the only thing still standing in front of that rage is Jacoby Jacobs.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross is even angrier now!"

Mark Bravo: "And that is terrifying. Because a pissed-off Chris Ross is dangerous. A betrayed, humiliated, doubly pissed-off Chris Ross? That's a whole different animal."

Jacoby tries to backpedal immediately, hands up, saying something, maybe talking trash, maybe trying to save face, maybe trying to survive.

Jacoby Jacobs: "Yo, hold up, hold up—"

Ross lunges.

One hand grabs Jacoby by the throat.

The other by the waistband.

And Ross launches him halfway across the ring with a violent throw that sends Jacobs crashing flat on his back near center canvas.

John Phillips: "My God!"

Mark Bravo: "He threw him like he was nothin'!"

The crowd erupts as Ross storms after him, no wasted motion, no pause to posture, no time for Jacoby to even fully sit up before Ross is on him with mounted forearm shots. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Just a barrage of ugly, brutal punches raining down while the referee dives in to warn him and Jacoby covers up like a man suddenly realizing all his confidence was rented.

John Phillips: "Ross is unloading!"

Mark Bravo: "This is not wrestling anymore. This is punishment."

Ross drags Jacoby up by the back of the neck and hammers him with a short headbutt that sends him stumbling sideways. Then comes a German suplex. Jacoby hits hard, rolls through on instinct, and Ross grabs him again before he can crawl away.

Second German.

Jacoby bounces off that one and nearly folds in half.

John Phillips: "He is ragdolling him!"

Ross rises, breathing hard, then stalks forward and boots Jacoby in the ribs so hard the body rolls toward the ropes. Jacoby tries to use them to pull up. Ross charges and levels him with a running clothesline that sends him spilling through the middle rope to the floor near the First Class corner.

Mark Bravo: "Good God! Jacoby is gettin' launched all over this ring and now out of it!"

Darran drops off the apron to help his partner, but he hesitates when Ross hits the ropes on the far side and comes charging back toward them. Ross doesn't dive out. He just slams both hands onto the top rope and screams down at them like a man daring either one to come test him next.

Chris Ross: "COME ON!"

John Phillips: "Chris Ross is absolutely unhinged now!"

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because this was supposed to be the chance for First Class to capitalize. Instead they just found out the hard way that a distracted Chris Ross is dangerous, but a betrayed Chris Ross is a natural disaster."

The referee is counting, trying to restore order, trying to get Ross back into the ring, trying to get Jacoby back to his feet, trying to make sense out of a situation that has lost all structure.

On the floor, Ace Andrews and Samuel Scythe are still there.

Still watching.

Still offering nothing.

And in the ring, Chris Ross stands alone.

Still furious.

Still hunting.

And somehow, more dangerous now than he was before his own partner walked away.

On the floor, Jacoby Jacobs is still trying to gather himself, one hand on the apron, the other across his ribs, while Darran Darrington hovers near him and keeps one nervous eye on the ring. Inside the ropes, Chris Ross is pacing again, still barking down at First Class, still full of rage with nowhere clean to put it.

John Phillips: "And there they are again. Ace Andrews and Samuel Scythe still standing off to the side like none of this concerns them."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and that's the sick part. It absolutely concerns them. They helped create it."

Ace Andrews finally leans toward Samuel Scythe and says something quietly.

Then, for the first time since pulling off the apron, he gives a visible instruction.

Ace Andrews: "Come on."

Samuel Scythe never looks away from the ring.

Not immediately.

He just keeps that same dead, thousand-yard stare on Chris Ross for one more long, cold second.

Then he turns.

And together, Ace Andrews and Samuel Scythe begin walking up the ramp.

The crowd erupts in even louder boos.

John Phillips: "They're leaving!"

Mark Bravo: "Oh, come on! They are absolutely leaving him! Ace just told Scythe to come on, and now they're headed up the ramp like this whole thing was just business."

Chris Ross sees it.

Of course he sees it.

And whatever was left of his patience snaps again.

Chris Ross: "Yeah! Walk away! Walk away then!"

He storms toward the ropes, shouting after them, one hand pointing up the aisle while the other slaps against his own chest like he cannot believe this is happening, like some part of him still expected violence to mean loyalty for longer than ten minutes.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross is livid!"

Mark Bravo: "He's beyond livid. He just got used. That's what this feels like. Used."

Ace never turns around.

He just keeps walking, posture immaculate, one hand adjusting his jacket as if nothing in the world behind him requires another thought. Samuel Scythe follows at his side, heavy steps, hood still down, no emotion on his face, no apology, no explanation, nothing.

John Phillips: "What is Ace Andrews doing here? What is the point of all this? To align with Ross just long enough to destabilize him? To make a statement? To prove he can pull the strings on chaos and walk away before the bill comes due?"

Mark Bravo: "Whatever the long game is, the short game is real simple. Chris Ross is alone now."

And that realization hits all at once.

Because while Ross is still yelling toward the ramp, still consumed by the departure, First Class starts to recover. Jacoby and Darran regroup on the floor. Maxwell Jett leans over the ropes from the apron, shouting instructions now that the numbers advantage is no longer theoretical.

Maxwell Jett: "There you go! There you go! Let him self-destruct!"

John Phillips: "Maxwell Jett barking orders now that he sees exactly what this has become."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because now it's three-on-one, and Jett knows it."

Ross turns from the ropes and sees them regrouping.

Sees Jacoby climbing back to the apron.

Sees Darran circling wide on the floor.

Sees Jett grinning from the corner.

And for one instant, the whole ring picture changes.

No partner.

No backup.

No cavalry coming.

Just Chris Ross, still furious enough to fight the whole company if he has to.

John Phillips: "We are continuing now with Chris Ross completely abandoned, and somehow I still don't think that makes this easier for First Class."

Mark Bravo: "No, because if you backed a wounded animal into a corner and then set it on fire, the numbers don't always help as much as you think."

Ross wipes sweat and spit from his mouth with the back of one hand and then plants himself in the center of the ring. He looks from Jacoby... to Darran... to Jett.

Then he nods once.

Not because he accepts it.

Because he understands it.

This is what the match is now.

And if they want him alone...

They are going to have to survive him that way.

The arena noise changes.

Not louder.

Different.

The kind of sound a crowd makes when they realize the chaos has settled just enough for something worse to become organized.

Chris Ross stands alone in the center of the ring, chest rising and falling, sweat dripping off him, rage still rolling off his body in waves. He does not pace now.

He plants.

Waits.

Seethes.

John Phillips: "Listen to this place. Everybody understands what just happened."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. The smoke cleared, and now all that's left is the truth. Chris Ross is in there by himself."

On the floor, Ace Andrews and Samuel Scythe continue up the ramp without a second glance back. That image stays in the fans' minds even as the camera returns to the ring, where another picture is taking shape now.

Jacoby Jacobs is back on the apron.

Darran Darrington is back in position on the floor and climbing up.

Maxwell Jett is in his corner, composed again, the smirk restored, watching the whole thing with the calm satisfaction of a man who believes the night has finally bent to his design.

John Phillips: "And now Maxwell Jett is starting to realize exactly what kind of advantage has been placed in his lap."

Mark Bravo: "Not just realize it. He's about to conduct it."

Ross stares across at him.

Jett stares back.

There is no rush.

That's what makes it worse.

Because this is no longer panic.

This is orchestration.

Jett steps through the ropes.

Then gestures with one hand.

A little circle of the finger.

A little smirk.

A little command.

Maxwell Jett: "Go ahead."

Jacoby enters.

Darran enters from the opposite side.

Now all three men of First Class are in the ring.

The crowd rains boos.

John Phillips: "This is disgusting."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, but it's smart disgusting. That's the worst kind."

They do not attack right away.

They circle.

Jett in front.

Jacoby to one side.

Darran to the other.

And in the middle, Chris Ross slowly turns, eyes moving from one to the next, shoulders tightening again, every instinct in his body telling him this is the moment the numbers finally stop being abstract.

John Phillips: "They are circling him."

Mark Bravo: "And for the first time tonight... even Chris Ross might really be in trouble."

Ross pivots toward Jacoby.

Then toward Darran.

Then back toward Jett.

He does not look scared.

He does not back down.

But there is a difference between being fearless and being invincible, and right now Maxwell Jett is trying to prove the second thing doesn't exist.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross has fought angry all night. He has fought reckless all night. But this is the first moment where the math may finally catch up to him."

Mark Bravo: "Exactly. He can throw one man around. He can hurt two men. But three at once, all organized, all fresh enough, and all taking orders from a guy who knows how to exploit every crack in a situation? That's bad."

Jett keeps talking as they circle.

Maxwell Jett: "Look at you."

Maxwell Jett: "No title. No partner. No plan."

Ross spits on the canvas.

Jett just smiles wider.

Maxwell Jett: "This is what happens when you confuse rage for control."

Mark Bravo: "There he goes. Villain lecture."

John Phillips: "And the thing is, Chris Ross still looks like he wants to fight all three of them anyway."

He does.

You can see it in the posture.

He drops his center of gravity just a little.

Hands flex.

Eyes narrow.

He is ready to explode at whichever one gets closest first.

But now, for the first time tonight, the danger around him feels deliberate instead of chaotic.

That is Maxwell Jett's true gift.

Not just surviving chaos.

Directing it.

John Phillips: "This has slowed down in the worst possible way."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because they're not rushing. They're enjoying it. That tells you they think they've got him."

The crowd is loud now, trying to will Ross through it, but even they can feel the shift. The energy is no longer about vengeance. It is about danger.

Real danger.

For the first time since he came through the curtain, Chris Ross is not just furious.

He is surrounded.

Maxwell Jett's smile tightens.

Then he gives the signal.

John Phillips: "Here they go!"

All three men of First Class attack at once.

Jacoby Jacobs crashes in from the left with clubbing forearms.

Darran Darrington charges from the right with a shoulder to the ribs.

Maxwell Jett steps straight through the middle and drives a sharp forearm right into Chris Ross' jaw.

The crowd erupts in furious boos.

Mark Bravo: "Oh, they're swarming him!"

Ross staggers, but only half a step.

Then he fires back.

He catches Jacoby first with a wild right hand that sends him stumbling backward into the ropes. He wheels and blasts Darran with a short-arm clothesline that folds him up and drops him to all fours. Jett comes in again and Ross meets him with a headbutt that snaps the champion backward and gets the whole building roaring.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross is fighting them all!"

Mark Bravo: "Because that's all he knows how to do!"

Ross grabs Darran by the head and hurls him into Jacoby. Both men tangle together for a second, and Ross turns back to Jett with murder in his eyes, storming forward as the champion tries to reset.

But this is the trap.

Because while Ross can hurt one man...

And maybe two...

Three is different.

Jacoby grabs him from behind.

Darran drives a forearm into the kidney.

Jett steps in with another sharp shot to the face.

John Phillips: "This is too much!"

Ross tries to throw Jacoby off.

He almost does.

But Darran crashes into him again.

Then Jett.

Then Jacoby with another shot from behind.

The rhythm changes.

Ross is no longer throwing them off.

Now he's absorbing.

Now he's grinding.

Now he's trying to stand through a gang beating in the middle of the ring.

Mark Bravo: "The numbers are finally catching him!"

A huge roar rises from the crowd as Ross swings one more time and catches Jacoby across the mouth, but this time Jett immediately follows with a running knee to the side of the head. Ross stumbles.

Darran clubs him across the back.

Jacoby drives into the stomach.

Ross drops to one knee.

John Phillips: "Ross is down to a knee!"

The boos get even louder now.

Deafening.

Venomous.

The fans hate this.

They know what they are seeing.

First Valentina Blaze was taken out.

Now Chris Ross is being dismantled in front of them three-on-one.

John Phillips: "Listen to this crowd! They hate every second of this!"

Mark Bravo: "Because they know what this is! First Valentina Blaze gets taken out of action... now Chris Ross is getting jumped in the middle of the ring and there's nobody coming to save him!"

Ross tries to rise off the knee.

Jett kicks him in the face.

Darran blasts him from the side.

Jacoby shoves him forward.

And the second time Chris Ross drops, they take him all the way off his feet.

He crashes to the canvas under the combined assault.

John Phillips: "And now they've got him down!"

Mark Bravo: "This is exactly what everybody feared!"

With Ross on the mat, First Class descends.

Stomps from Jacoby.

Stomps from Darran.

And Maxwell Jett standing over it for a beat, taking in the hatred, taking in the scene, before finally joining in with a vicious boot of his own.

The crowd is booing like crazy now.

The building shaking with it.

John Phillips: "This is sickening!"

Mark Bravo: "And the worst part is, nobody's stopping it! Nobody! Ross came out here ready to fight the whole world and now the whole world might be swallowing him up!"

Chris Ross rolls, covers up, tries to plant a hand and get back to his knees, but every time he does another shot crashes into him. Another stomp. Another forearm. Another cheap kick. Another reminder that no matter how dangerous one man is, three can still pull him apart if they get organized enough.

John Phillips: "First Valentina Blaze was taken out..."

Mark Bravo: "And now it looks like Chris Ross might be next."

Jett backs up just enough to admire the wreckage for one second while Jacoby and Darran continue the assault. Then the UTA Champion points down at Ross like a king sentencing a problem to death by committee.

And the crowd keeps booing.

Louder.

Meaner.

Because they do not just hate First Class right now.

They hate what this might mean.

They hate the possibility that after everything Chris Ross has lost...

after all the rage...

after all the fight...

this is how his night might end.

The referee is all over it immediately.

Or at least he tries to be.

He throws himself between bodies, shoving at shoulders, barking orders, trying to force separation where there is none to be found.

Referee: "Back up! Back up! Get outta there! One at a time! One at a—"

He gets no further.

Maxwell Jett steps in, annoyed more than anything else, and shoves the referee hard across the chest. The official stumbles sideways, nearly losing his footing as Jett points down at Chris Ross like a king ordering a public execution.

Maxwell Jett: "Keep stomping him!"

John Phillips: "Jett just shoved the referee away!"

Mark Bravo: "And now he's got the Rich Young GRAPPLRZ continuing the assault! This is completely outta control!"

Jacoby and Darran oblige immediately, crashing boots down onto Ross again and again while the former UTA Champion tries to cover up, tries to rise, tries to get one knee under himself only to have another stomp crash him back down.

The crowd is booing like crazy now.

They hate this.

They know what it means.

First Valentina Blaze is taken out.

Now Chris Ross is being stomped into the mat by three men while the official is powerless to stop it.

John Phillips: "This is exactly what everyone feared! Valentina Blaze is already out of the picture, and now First Class is trying to end Chris Ross too!"

Mark Bravo: "And there is nobody left! Nobody!"

Then—

"HOLIDAY" by Green Day hits.

The building explodes.

John Phillips: "WAIT A SECOND!"

Mark Bravo: "NO WAY!"

Maxx Mayhem comes running through the curtain with a steel chair in hand.

Not walking.

Not posing.

Running like a man who heard chaos calling his name and answered on the first ring.

John Phillips: "It's Maxx Mayhem!"

Mark Bravo: "We saw this before! We saw Maxx Mayhem come to Chris Ross' aid inside the steel cage, and now here he comes again!"

But even as the crowd roars, there is uncertainty inside the reaction too.

Because this is Maxx Mayhem.

Chaos has never needed a side when he's around.

John Phillips: "But why is he here? Is he here to save Chris Ross... or is he just here to make this even worse?"

Mark Bravo: "With Maxx Mayhem, those might be the same damn thing!"

Mayhem sprints down the ramp at full speed, chair gripped in both hands now, eyes wide, grin wild, the whole building rising with him as First Class finally turns and realizes the cavalry is not orderly at all, but it is arriving.

John Phillips: "First Class sees him now!"

Maxx slides into the ring.

Chair raised.

And swings immediately at Maxwell Jett.

John Phillips: "MAYHEM WITH THE CHAIR!"

But Jett ducks.

And the chair keeps going.

BAM!

It catches the referee square in the face.

The official drops like he's been unplugged.

John Phillips: "OH NO!"

Mark Bravo: "HE HIT THE REF! HE HIT THE REF DEAD IN THE FACE!"

For one second, the whole ring freezes.

The referee is laid out.

Chris Ross is still down.

Maxx Mayhem is standing there with the chair in his hands.

And Maxwell Jett's eyes go wide.

Then he actually laughs.

John Phillips: "Jett's laughing!"

Mark Bravo: "Because of course he is! This lunatic just made the whole thing even better for him!"

Mayhem whips back around, maybe to correct the mistake, maybe to clean house, maybe to prove he really did come to turn the tide.

He never gets the chance.

Darran Darrington drives a kick into his gut.

Mayhem folds.

The steel chair drops from his hands and clatters to the mat.

John Phillips: "Darran caught him!"

Mark Bravo: "And now Maxx Mayhem is in trouble too!"

Jacoby pounces first with forearms.

Darran follows with stomps.

And Jett steps in behind them, the grin now stretched almost to madness as he realizes this is no longer just a mugging.

It is anarchy.

John Phillips: "Now the beatdown has turned onto Maxx Mayhem!"

Ross tries to rise in the background, dragging himself up by the ropes while Mayhem gets swarmed where he stands. The referee remains completely laid out. No one is calling for the bell. No one is restoring order. No one is in charge anymore.

Mark Bravo: "The referee is out cold! Chris Ross is down! Maxx Mayhem came flying in with a chair and now he's getting stomped too! This match has completely devolved into anarchy!"

John Phillips: "There are no rules left in this ring right now! None!"

First Class stomps Mayhem down to a knee, then off his feet just like they did Ross. The crowd is booing in absolute disgust, the ring filling with bodies and violence and noise, while Jett barks out orders over all of it like a man conducting a symphony of cheating and cheap shots.

Maxwell Jett: "Stay on him! Stay on both of 'em!"

The steel chair lies abandoned near center ring.

The referee lies unconscious beside it.

Chris Ross is trying to stand.

Maxx Mayhem is being stomped out.

And the match, whatever it was supposed to be, is gone.

This is not organized.

This is not controlled.

This is not wrestling anymore.

This is anarchy.

The ring has become a graveyard of motion.

The referee is still laid out near center ring, one arm twisted beneath him, eyes shut, the result of Maxx Mayhem's wild save attempt gone wrong. Mayhem himself is down near the ropes, still being stomped into silence by chaos and numbers and bad timing. Chris Ross is trying to rise, but only in pieces.

And then Maxwell Jett sees it.

The steel chair.

Lying on the canvas.

Waiting.

Jett looks down at it.

And smiles again.

John Phillips: "No..."

Mark Bravo: "Oh, don't do this."

Slowly, Maxwell bends and picks the chair up off the mat with both hands. He doesn't rush. He doesn't swing immediately. He just stands there with it, breathing steady, smiling that same rotten smile while the crowd rains hatred down on him from every corner of the building.

John Phillips: "That look on his face..."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, I don't like that look at all."

Jett turns his head toward Jacoby and Darran, who are still near Ross.

Maxwell Jett: "Pick him up."

The boos get louder.

Angrier.

Because everyone in the building understands exactly what that means.

John Phillips: "No. No, no, no..."

Jacoby and Darran obey immediately.

They grab Chris Ross by the arms and drag him up off the mat, forcing him to his knees in the middle of the ring. Ross is still trying to fight. Still trying to throw them off. Still trying to get his body under him.

But it is not enough.

Not with two men holding him down and a third walking toward him with a steel chair in his hands.

Mark Bravo: "Oh my God..."

John Phillips: "Are we about to see an execution?"

The crowd is booing like crazy now.

Not just because they hate First Class.

Because this feels like something worse.

Because Valentina Blaze was already taken out.

Because Ross was already abandoned.

Because now, in the middle of all this anarchy, Maxwell Jett is holding a steel chair and staring down at the former UTA Champion like a man deciding how permanent he wants the next moment to be.

John Phillips: "First Valentina Blaze... now Chris Ross..."

Mark Bravo: "And there's nobody standing between him and this chair shot except two goons making sure Ross can't even defend himself!"

Ross lifts his head.

His face is a mask of rage and exhaustion, chest heaving, teeth bared, eyes burning straight through Maxwell Jett.

And even kneeling, even held down, Chris Ross somehow still looks dangerous.

Jett seems to enjoy that.

He takes another slow step closer, chair hanging at his side for now.

Maxwell Jett: "Look at you."

Maxwell Jett: "This is what happens when you keep mistaking yourself for the main character."

John Phillips: "This is sick."

Jett lifts the chair with both hands now, not above his head yet, but enough for the image to become terrifyingly clear.

Ross strains against Jacoby and Darran.

Mayhem is stirring near the ropes.

The referee is still down.

And the whole arena is screaming.

Mark Bravo: "If he swings that chair clean, if he catches Ross flush like this..."

John Phillips: "Then yes. We may be looking at an execution."

For one frozen second, the building holds its breath.

Maxwell Jett stands over a kneeling Chris Ross with a steel chair in his hands, Jacoby and Darran keeping the former champion in place, and every fan in the CHI Health Center united in the exact same feeling:

They hate this.

And they are terrified of what comes next.

Chris Ross is held in place on both sides, forced to his knees in the middle of the ring while Maxwell Jett stands over him with the steel chair gripped in both hands.

The crowd is in full revolt now.

Booing.

Screaming.

Begging for something to stop this before it goes where everybody knows it is about to go.

John Phillips: "No... no, somebody has to stop this..."

Ross lifts his head.

Bloodshot eyes.

Teeth bared.

Held down.

Beaten.

Still defiant.

Chris Ross: "If you're gonna do it..."

He spits blood and sweat onto the mat.

Chris Ross: "FUCKING DO IT!"

The line detonates through the building.

Mark Bravo: "Oh my God..."

And Maxwell Jett obliges.

He swings.

The chair comes down with horrifying force.

CRACK.

It catches Chris Ross across the top of the skull with a sickening thud that seems to freeze the whole arena for half a heartbeat after it lands.

John Phillips: "NO!"

The metal bends on impact.

Not much.

Just enough.

Enough to leave it marked forever with the shape of a Chris Ross head driven into it.

Jacoby and Darran let go immediately.

Ross drops.

Not folding.

Not slumping.

Falling.

Flat to the canvas.

Arms stretched out wide as he hits, sprawled like a man nailed down where he landed.

Mark Bravo: "He cracked him! He cracked him right across the top of the skull!"

John Phillips: "That chair is dented! That chair has a Chris Ross imprint in it!"

The boos that follow are volcanic.

Pure hatred raining down on First Class as Maxwell Jett stands over the fallen former UTA Champion, chair still in his hands, breathing hard, eyes wild with a kind of triumphant sickness that only makes the image worse.

Ross does not move.

Not right away.

He just lies there.

Flat on his back.

Arms out.

Chest barely rising.

The image is awful.

John Phillips: "This has gone way too far!"

Mark Bravo: "First Valentina Blaze... now Chris Ross... and Maxx Mayhem's down too! This isn't even a match anymore!"

Near the ropes, Maxx Mayhem is trying to push himself up, but he is still dazed. The referee remains laid out, useless to stop any of it. Jacoby and Darran back away for a second just to admire the damage, the crowd hurling every ounce of disgust they have at them.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross is laid out in the middle of the ring like a sacrifice!"

Maxwell Jett slowly lowers the chair and looks down at the dent in it.

Then down at Ross.

Then out at the crowd.

And somehow, impossibly, he smiles again.

Maxwell Jett stands over Chris Ross for one more second, the dented steel chair hanging at his side, the shape of the impact still visible in the metal.

Ross lies flat on the canvas, arms stretched out, barely moving.

And that should be enough.

For anyone else, it would be enough.

Not for Maxwell Jett.

John Phillips: "Please tell me this is done."

Mark Bravo: "It should be. It absolutely should be."

Jett looks up.

Toward the ropes.

Toward the man still trying to pull himself back into the fight.

Toward Maxx Mayhem.

Mayhem is dragging himself up with one arm, shaking his head, still trying to get to Chris Ross even after everything that has happened. He sees Ross down. Sees the chair. Sees Jett standing over him.

And somehow, through all the damage, Maxx still looks ready to throw himself right back into the fire.

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem is still trying to get back into this!"

Mark Bravo: "Because whatever else Maxx is, he ain't gonna just sit there and watch this if he can still move!"

Jett sees it too.

And laughs.

Then he points.

Maxwell Jett: "Grab him."

The crowd unleashes another wave of hatred.

Maxwell Jett: "Maxx wants to come save Chris Ross..."

Jett's grin widens as Jacoby and Darran turn immediately toward the ropes.

Maxwell Jett: "He can get his too."

John Phillips: "No! No, now they're going after Mayhem!"

Mark Bravo: "Because of course they are! Of course Maxwell Jett can't leave well enough alone!"

Jacoby is on Maxx first, grabbing him by the arm and shoulder as Mayhem tries to swing his way free. Darran joins in from the other side, and now it takes both of them to wrench the chaotic brawler away from the ropes and into the center of the ring.

Mayhem fights the whole way.

Throwing elbows.

Kicking wildly.

Cursing.

Trying to reach Ross even as they drag him farther from him.

Maxx Mayhem: "GET OFF ME!"

John Phillips: "He's still trying to get to Ross!"

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because that's what this was! Mayhem came flying out here because he was trying to stop a damn execution!"

But the numbers win again.

Jacoby twists the arm.

Darran clubs him from behind.

And together they drag Maxx Mayhem to his knees not far from where Chris Ross still lies motionless on the mat.

The visual is sickening.

Two men down.

One referee out cold.

And Maxwell Jett in full command of the wreckage.

John Phillips: "This is disgusting!"

Mark Bravo: "This ain't a match, John. This is a gang assault with music cues."

Jett drops the dented chair for the moment and slowly stalks toward Mayhem now, eyes lit with the same cruel amusement he had a moment ago standing over Ross. He crouches in front of him just enough to make eye contact.

Maxwell Jett: "You really thought you were the hero here?"

Mayhem, even held in place, still grins through the pain.

Maxx Mayhem: "You talk too much."

Jett slaps him across the face.

John Phillips: "Oh, come on!"

The crowd explodes again in boos as Jett rises and gestures for Jacoby and Darran to keep Mayhem up. And they do. They haul him higher, forcing him to his feet just enough to make him available for whatever fresh hell Jett has in mind.

Mark Bravo: "Maxx Mayhem came out here tryin' to stop this... and now he may be about to pay for that too."

Jett turns his head and looks from Mayhem...

to Ross...

to the unconscious referee...

then back again.

The ring is his.

The chaos is his.

And the fans hate him more with every second he keeps it that way.

John Phillips: "First Chris Ross. Now Maxx Mayhem. And there is still nobody out here to stop this!"

Mark Bravo: "If somebody doesn't hit that curtain soon, we're about to watch First Class dismantle two men in the middle of the ring just because they can."

Maxwell Jett straightens up, wipes at his jaw with his thumb, and takes one slow step toward Maxx Mayhem.

Whatever comes next...

the crowd knows it won't be mercy.

Jacoby Jacobs and Darran Darrington keep Maxx Mayhem held upright, one on each side, dragging him into place while Maxwell Jett stalks in front of him with that same poisonous grin still painted across his face.

Chris Ross is still down behind them.

The referee is still out cold.

The crowd is booing in absolute disgust.

John Phillips: "This is beyond unacceptable."

Mark Bravo: "And somehow Jett looks like he's having the time of his life."

Mayhem spits blood to the side and laughs once, but it is uglier now. More broken. More dangerous. He lifts his head and stares straight at Maxwell Jett, eyes wild, jaw hanging just crooked enough to show how much damage he has already taken.

Maxx Mayhem: "What, that all you got, princess?"

The crowd roars.

Jett's smile never leaves.

Maxx Mayhem: "Go on then."

Maxx Mayhem: "Make your mum proud."

The line gets a huge reaction.

Mark Bravo: "Oh no."

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem still jawing with him through all of this!"

Mayhem jerks against the grip holding him and barks again, louder this time.

Maxx Mayhem: "Bet your mum still wishes she swallowed you!"

The crowd gasps and then erupts.

Mark Bravo: "Good Lord!"

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem just lit a match and threw it right in Jett's face!"

And Maxwell Jett?

He sure is going to enjoy this.

You can see it.

The grin widens.

The eyes sharpen.

Whatever little line might have existed between anger and enjoyment has been crossed, and now there is nothing left in him but vanity, cruelty, and the thrill of absolute control.

Maxwell Jett: "You really should've stopped talking."

He reaches down and picks the steel chair back up.

The dent from Chris Ross' skull is still in it.

That detail turns the whole building colder.

John Phillips: "No. No, not again..."

Mark Bravo: "Don't do this. Don't do this again."

Mayhem sees it.

He laughs once more.

It sounds half-insane and half-defiant.

Maxx Mayhem: "Go on then, ya twat."

Maxx Mayhem: "Let's see if your mum finally loves you after this."

The crowd is losing its mind now, booing so loudly it feels like the whole arena is shaking.

And Maxwell Jett absolutely revels in it.

He steps in.

Raises the chair.

And swings.

CRACK.

The chair comes down across the top of Maxx Mayhem's skull with another terrible, sickening shot, the impact so loud and so ugly that the whole crowd recoils from it in one collective wave.

John Phillips: "OH MY GOD!"

Mark Bravo: "HE DID IT AGAIN!"

Jacoby and Darran let go immediately.

Mayhem collapses straight down to the mat in a limp heap beside Chris Ross, body spilling sideways, one arm twitching once before going still.

The ring is silent for a half-second after the impact.

Not because the fans stopped caring.

Because they cannot believe what they just saw.

John Phillips: "Maxx Mayhem just received the exact same treatment as Chris Ross!"

Mark Bravo: "Two men! Two men laid out with sickening chair shots while the referee is unconscious and this jackass is grinning like he just cured a disease!"

Maxwell Jett lowers the chair slowly and looks down at the new damage, admiring it like a sculptor pleased with the finish on a piece no decent human being should ever have made.

Then he looks at the two fallen men.

Chris Ross.

Maxx Mayhem.

Both down.

Both wrecked.

And around them, First Class stands tall amid the ruins.

John Phillips: "This, ladies and gentlemen... is our champion?"

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. That's him. That's Maxwell Jett. UTA Champion. Smiling over two bodies like this is some kind of red-carpet moment."

The boos are apocalyptic now.

Pure hatred.

Pure disgust.

Because whatever you want to call Maxwell Jett after this, whatever excuses he gives, whatever smug little explanation he cooks up later...

the image will not change.

Two men down.

A referee unconscious.

A steel chair bent by human skulls.

And the UTA Champion smiling in the middle of it all.

And now, finally, the back empties.

Officials.

Referees.

Medics.

Producers.

Scott Stevens at the front of it all, already shouting before he even reaches ringside.

John Phillips: "Here they come! Finally, somebody is coming out here to stop this!"

Mark Bravo: "A little late, but yeah! Here come the cavalry, the medics, the producers, the whole damn company!"

The crowd is booing without mercy now, their hatred raining down on First Class as the scene in the ring finally becomes too ugly, too public, too undeniable to leave unattended for one more second.

Chris Ross is down.

Maxx Mayhem is down.

The referee is still out.

And Maxwell Jett is still smiling.

Scott Stevens: "Get in there! Move! Now!"

Jett hears him.

Looks over.

Then just laughs.

A sharp, rotten little laugh that somehow makes the whole thing feel even worse than the chair shots already did.

Then he lets the steel chair fall from his hands.

It hits the mat with a hollow metallic clatter.

The dent in it remains.

Visible.

Ugly.

Damning.

John Phillips: "He's laughing."

Mark Bravo: "Because of course he is. Because to Maxwell Jett, this is all still about him."

Jacoby Jacobs and Darran Darrington back off as officials flood the ring, not out of remorse, not out of fear exactly, but because their work is already done. Medics rush first to the fallen referee, then to Ross, then to Maxx Mayhem, trying to triage a scene that stopped being a wrestling match several minutes ago.

John Phillips: "There are bodies everywhere..."

Mark Bravo: "And no one knows who to check first!"

Scott Stevens reaches the apron and points furiously at First Class, screaming for them to get out. The UTA Champion just keeps smirking as he backs toward the ropes, fully satisfied with the destruction left behind him.

Scott Stevens: "Get them out of the ring! Get them out of here!"

The crowd keeps booing.

Louder.

Meaner.

Because what they have watched tonight is not a victory.

It is not even really a finish.

It is a collapse.

John Phillips: "There are no winners in this match."

Mark Bravo: "No. None. Not tonight."

Medics kneel around Chris Ross and Maxx Mayhem now, checking them both while producers shout over each other and the ring slowly fills with the kind of movement that only happens when the performance has ended and the emergency has begun.

John Phillips: "The record books may say this ended in a no contest..."

Mark Bravo: "But we know better."

The camera lingers on the wreckage.

Chris Ross, still flat on the canvas.

Maxx Mayhem, collapsed beside him.

The referee out cold.

The dented chair lying abandoned between them all like physical proof of how far this thing went.

John Phillips: "This night will be remembered."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah."

Mark Bravo: "Not because of who won."

Mark Bravo: "But because of how dark it got."

And somewhere in the background, Maxwell Jett is still being escorted away, still smiling, while the crowd buries him in hatred and the ring remains full of officials trying to make sense of a scene no one will forget anytime soon.

John Phillips: "Victorious: 2026 will have a lot of moments attached to it when people look back..."

John Phillips: "But this one..."

John Phillips: "This one will live in infamy."

A Statement

Segment

The scene cuts backstage.

The hallway is still alive with motion.

Officials are running one direction.

Medics another.

The whole arena feels like it has been knocked off its axis by what just happened out there.

And through all of it, Melissa Cartwright is moving quickly, microphone in hand, catching up to two men who seem entirely too calm for the kind of destruction they left behind.

Ace Andrews walks with that same smooth, infuriating confidence.

Samuel Scythe follows beside him.

Silent.

Stone-faced.

Like what happened in the ring barely registers as unusual.

Melissa Cartwright: "Ace! Ace—hold on a second!"

Ace slows just enough to allow the camera and Melissa into his orbit.

Not because he has to.

Because he wants to.

Melissa Cartwright: "Why?"

Melissa Cartwright: "Why abandon Chris Ross like that? Why allow for what we just saw to happen?"

Ace stops fully now.

He turns his head toward Melissa with a look that borders on amused, as though the question itself is somehow smaller than the answer deserves.

Ace Andrews: "Why not?"

Melissa blinks.

That was clearly not the answer she expected.

Ace smiles.

Ace Andrews: "I didn't come to UTA to make friends."

Ace Andrews: "I came here to make sure Samuel Scythe and Bianca Page make statements."

Ace Andrews: "And tonight..."

He tilts his head slightly, the smile deepening just enough to make it feel worse.

Ace Andrews: "That was a statement."

Melissa Cartwright: "A statement?"

Melissa Cartwright: "Two men were left laid out in that ring. Chris Ross trusted—"

Ace Andrews: "Trusted?"

He lets out a soft laugh.

Ace Andrews: "Melissa, please."

Ace Andrews: "Chris Ross trusted anger."

Ace Andrews: "He trusted violence."

Ace Andrews: "He trusted his own appetite for destruction and mistook that for alignment."

Ace glances off for just a second, then back again.

Ace Andrews: "That's not trust."

Ace Andrews: "That's convenience."

Samuel Scythe remains silent beside him, eyes forward, posture unreadable. If he feels anything about Ross being left behind, it does not touch his face.

Melissa Cartwright: "So that was the plan?"

Melissa Cartwright: "Use him? Let him get taken apart? Stand there and watch?"

Ace's expression never changes.

Ace Andrews: "No."

Ace Andrews: "The plan was revelation."

Ace Andrews: "The rest was just honesty."

Melissa looks bewildered now, trying to process a man who sounds like he is describing strategy in the language of philosophy while two bodies are still being attended to somewhere behind them.

Melissa Cartwright: "Chris Ross—"

Ace cuts her off gently.

Ace Andrews: "Chris Ross..."

He smirks at the name before the next line.

Ace Andrews: "The 'Reaper' of Harrisburg."

The smirk widens.

Ace Andrews: "You, sir..."

Ace Andrews: "Will reap what you sow."

That line hangs in the hallway for a moment.

Melissa just stares at him, completely bewildered now.

Not because she doesn't understand the words.

Because she understands exactly enough to know how cold they are.

Melissa Cartwright: "You're saying Chris Ross deserved that?"

Ace gives her one last glance.

Ace Andrews: "I'm saying..."

Ace Andrews: "Everybody does."

He turns and starts walking again.

Samuel Scythe follows beside him without a word, without a look back, without even the courtesy of pretending there is something left to explain.

Melissa stays where she is, microphone lowered now, visibly stunned by what she just heard.

John Phillips: "Melissa Cartwright left absolutely bewildered there."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because how are you supposed to respond to that? Ace Andrews just looked at what happened out there and called it a statement."

The camera lingers on Melissa for one more second as she watches them disappear down the hallway, still trying to make sense of a night that seems determined to get darker every time it cuts to the back.

Wreckage

Segment

The scene cuts back to the ring.

And the chaos has not ended.

It has only changed shape.

The referee is being helped up the aisle in the background, supported on both sides, one official holding the back of his head while another keeps him steady. Outside the ring, Maxx Mayhem is strapped to a stretcher now, medics moving quickly as they prepare to get him to the back after the sickening chair shot he absorbed moments ago.

John Phillips: "We are back at ringside, and this is still a scene of absolute carnage."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and now the adrenaline's wearing off enough for the reality to set in. This is bad, partner. This is real bad."

Inside the ring, several medics and officials are clustered around Chris Ross.

He is still down.

A neck brace has been placed around him.

Scott Stevens is nearby, visibly upset, barking instructions, running both hands through his hair, looking like a man whose worst fears about this night have all come true at once.

John Phillips: "Scott Stevens is beside himself right now."

Mark Bravo: "Because what are you even supposed to do with this? You made a six-man tag to contain the chaos and instead the whole thing exploded in your face."

The process of getting Chris Ross out of the ring is slow.

Careful.

Delicate.

Two medics stabilize the head and neck while another helps guide a rigid pad underneath him. Another official kneels nearby, communicating every movement before it happens. The fans are almost eerily quiet now, the earlier rage having given way to something far more somber.

John Phillips: "The fans are just in shock."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. That's the word. Shock. Nobody wanted to see this. Nobody."

Ross is carefully shifted onto the pad in inches.

One shoulder.

Then the hips.

Then the legs.

Everything methodical. Everything controlled. Everything feeling far too serious for comfort.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross is really hurt here, ladies and gentlemen."

John Phillips: "This is not something anyone wanted to see."

The medics lift the pad together and move him to the edge of the ring, where another team on the floor reaches up to assist. It takes several hands, several voices, several seconds that feel much longer than they are, but eventually Ross is transferred from the ring to the waiting stretcher at ringside.

Up the aisle, Maxx Mayhem is already being wheeled toward the back, one medic at the head, another at the side,

while Scott Stevens pushes ahead of them through the crowd of personnel.

Scott Stevens: "Move! Move! Get out of the way! Clear it out!"

Mark Bravo: "Is that ambulance here yet?"

John Phillips: "That may be the question right now. We know Maxx Mayhem is on his way out of here, and now Chris Ross is being loaded onto a stretcher as well."

The camera stays with Ross.

Still strapped down.

Still wearing the neck brace.

Still being pushed up the ramp in a scene that feels more like the aftermath of a wreck than the end of a wrestling match.

The crowd watches in a hush that has only scattered shouts in it now.

Nobody knows what to do with their hands.

Nobody knows what to chant.

They just watch.

Then it happens.

Halfway up the ramp, one of Chris Ross' arms rises.

At first it is small.

Just a twitch.

Then more.

The hand curls.

The fist balls tight.

And once the fans see it, the whole building changes again.

John Phillips: "Wait a second..."

Mark Bravo: "No way..."

The crowd begins to scream.

Not boo.

Not chant.

Scream.

Because Chris Ross is moving.

More than moving.

Fighting.

His body jerks once.

Then again.

The medics and officials leap backward in alarm as Ross suddenly sits upright on the stretcher.

John Phillips: "HE SAT UP!"

Mark Bravo: "HOW IS CHRIS ROSS AWAKE?!"

The crowd explodes now.

Louder than they have all night.

Ross looks disoriented.

His eyes are not right.

His body is still shaky.

But the anger?

The anger is still there.

Maybe worse.

He reaches for the neck brace with both hands.

Scott Stevens: "Chris! No! Don't—don't do that!"

Ross rips it off.

Just tears it away from his neck and throws it aside while Stevens is still shouting for him to stop.

John Phillips: "No, no, no! He just ripped the brace off!"

Mark Bravo: "He is not right! He is absolutely not right, but he does not care!"

Ross swings his legs off the stretcher and shoves away the first medic who tries to steady him. Another official steps in and gets pushed aside too. His footing is uneven. His head is not fully there. But he is standing.

And the fans are cheering for him now.

Loudly.

Emotionally.

Because they know exactly what this is.

It is stupid.

It is dangerous.

It is completely on-brand.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross refuses to be taken out on a stretcher!"

Mark Bravo: "Of course he does! Of course he does! The man just got his skull caved in with a chair and he still refuses to leave this building like a victim!"

Scott Stevens tries to take hold of Ross' arm, trying to guide him, trying to calm him, trying to get some control back over a scene that has resisted control from the beginning.

Scott Stevens: "Chris, easy—easy, let us help you—"

Ross jerks his arm away immediately.

No words.

Just that same violent refusal that has defined him all night.

John Phillips: "Stevens tried to help him and Ross pulled away!"

Mark Bravo: "Because Chris Ross? He is not being carried out of here. Not tonight."

Ross stands on his own now, unsteady but upright, chest heaving, eyes still wild and unfocused in places. He clearly is disoriented. Clearly is hurt. Clearly should not be standing there under his own power.

But he is.

And whatever confusion lives in his body right now, the rage has survived all of it.

John Phillips: "Chris Ross... he refuses to be taken out on a stretcher. Tonight... he will walk out of here himself."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, but look at his eyes. Look at the way he's moving. He is hurt. Bad. There's no question about that."

Ross takes one slow step.

Then another.

The crowd roars with each one like they are watching a horror movie monster get back up after the kill shot.

Because in a way, that is exactly what this is.

Chris Ross is still here.

Still upright.

Still furious.

And that fury has grown.

By at least two names.

Maxwell Jett.

And Samuel Scythe.

John Phillips: "The anger hasn't left."

Mark Bravo: "No."

Mark Bravo: "It's gotten bigger."

The camera lingers on Ross, walking under his own power up the ramp, battered and unstable and somehow more dangerous now than when the night began, while Scott Stevens and the medics trail behind him helplessly, no longer leading the scene... only trying to keep up with it.

Proving Grounds

Segment

The screen fades up from black.

No music at first.

Just sound.

Footsteps in a hallway.

Ropes shaking.

A whistle.

A body hitting the mat.

Heavy breathing.

Then Scott Stevens' voice cuts through the dark.

Scott Stevens: "Everybody says they want this."

Scott Stevens: "Everybody says they're willing to do whatever it takes."

Scott Stevens: "For ten weeks... we find out who's telling the truth."

The beat drops.

Fast cuts hit the screen.

Las Vegas lights.

The Proving Grounds house.

The UTA training facility.

Eight recruits stepping out of SUVs.

Eight different faces.

Eight different attitudes.

One contract.

John Phillips: "It starts with a house full of strangers."

Mark Bravo: "And every one of them thinks they're the one walking out with a future."

We see Darren Valiant stepping out like he belongs on camera already.

Jace Van Ardent looking like the moment just became real.

Roxie Raze clocking the room in one glance.

Boone Mercer looking like he already hates the concept.

Silas Vale giving nothing away.

Lena Lux trying not to look overwhelmed.

Malik Steele calm and unreadable.

Tatum Quinn already studying everyone around her.

John Phillips: "Different styles. Different instincts. Different personalities."

Mark Bravo: "And the worst part? They don't just have to survive the work. They gotta survive each other."

The package shifts to the house.

Room assignments.

Quick side-eyes.

Awkward first laughs.

The first little sparks of tension before anybody has even locked up.

Scott Stevens: "This house is where you sleep, where you recover, where you doubt yourselves, where you annoy each other..."

Scott Stevens: "And where some of you are gonna realize you're not as ready for this as you thought you were."

The music builds harder now.

Training footage slams into place.

Rope runs before sunrise.

Flat-back bumps.

Box jumps.

Conditioning circuits.

People bent over.

People barking at each other.

People trying not to show how much it hurts.

Chris Ross: "When your lungs are burning and your legs stop listening..."

Chris Ross: "That's when you find out what's real."

John Phillips: "This isn't camp."

Mark Bravo: "No. This is where confidence gets tested, composure gets stripped, and excuses start dying."

Boone drives a weighted sled like he wants to shove the building over.

Jace drops to a knee, then fights back up.

Roxie refuses to show weakness even while her body's shaking.

Lena looks like she might break, then doesn't.

Silas misses a transition and hates that anyone saw it.

Darren gets called out for pacing too safely.

Tatum keeps going like a machine.

Malik looks like a threat without needing to announce it.

Scott Stevens: "You can fake confidence."

Scott Stevens: "You can fake charisma."

Scott Stevens: "Pain strips all of that off."

The package cuts to promo day.

A chair in the ring.

Melissa Cartwright with a mic.

One simple question.

Melissa Cartwright: "Why should WrestleUTA invest in you?"

John Phillips: "And then the pressure changes."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because now it's not about how hard you can train. It's about who you are when you gotta say it out loud."

We see Boone gripping a microphone like he'd rather break it.

Roxie smiling in someone's face while they unravel.

Lena trying to keep her voice steady.

Silas going cold.

Jace trying to make people feel something.

Darren looking straight into the lens like he was built for it.

Melissa Cartwright: "If you don't know who you are when that happens..."

Melissa Cartwright: "People can tell."

The pace quickens again.

Now it is rebuttals.

Arguments.

Truths getting pulled out in little vicious bursts.

Roxie and Lena going from condescension to honesty.

Jace and Silas nose to nose.

Boone and Darren hitting each other where it actually hurts.

Tatum and Malik saying more in one line than some people do in a whole segment.

John Phillips: "Some people found their voice."

Mark Bravo: "And some people found out they hate the sound of somebody else's."

The package transitions to partner week.

Scott holding envelopes.

The pairings being announced.

Faces reacting in real time.

Scott Stevens: "Today, it's not up to you."

John Phillips: "Now the game changes again."

Mark Bravo: "Because now it's not enough to be talented. Now you gotta work with somebody you would never choose."

Darren and Boone already arguing.

Jace and Silas dripping contempt without even raising their voices.

Roxie and Lena somehow starting to function.

Malik and Tatum looking like competence without chemistry.

Scott Stevens: "One of you is going home because this business does not wait for you to become easy to work with."

The package now becomes a storm of contrasts.

Some recruits getting better.

Some getting meaner.

Some surprising themselves.

Some leaking the truth all over the room.

John Phillips: "That's what Proving Grounds really is."

John Phillips: "Not just drills. Not just microphones. Not just house drama."

John Phillips: "It's exposure."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. It finds the cracks. It finds the ego. It finds the fear. It finds the people who can handle all of it..."

Mark Bravo: "And the people who can't."

Now the music hits its peak.

A barrage of shots.

Scott Stevens in the ring.

Chris Ross with arms folded at ringside.

Melissa watching everything.

Boone and Darren jawing.

Jace firing back at Silas.

Roxie telling Lena to keep up.

Lena fighting tears but not stopping.

Tatum finally showing a little humanity.

Malik smirking for the first time.

A recruit crying alone.

A partner collapsing after a carry.

A mic dropping to the mat.

A camera catching every second of it.

Scott Stevens: "One contract."

Scott Stevens: "That's it."

Scott Stevens: "So if you want this..."

Scott Stevens: "Show me."

John Phillips: "Every week, somebody rises."

Mark Bravo: "Every week, somebody cracks."

John Phillips: "Every week, the room gets smaller."

Mark Bravo: "And the truth gets louder."

The logo hits the screen.

PROVING GROUNDS

One last burst of footage.

Training.

Arguments.

Promos.

Sweat.

Doubt.

Ego.

Potential.

John Phillips: "The future of UTA doesn't just arrive."

Mark Bravo: "It gets dragged through the fire first."

TUNE IN EVERY WEEK
PROVING GROUNDS
WHO WANTS IT MOST?

The package cuts to black.

The Main Event

Segment

The screen fades to black.

For a moment there is no music.

Only silence.

Then the image flickers to life in washed-out gold and white.

A championship.

A celebration.

A woman crying with joy.

John Phillips: "To understand this main event..."

Mark Bravo: "You gotta go all the way back."

The video sharpens.

Marie Van Claudio stands in the ring with the Women's Championship, the culmination of a journey that meant more than just gold. She had come back. She had endured. She had climbed all the way back to the top.

John Phillips: "Marie Van Claudio returned to UTA to finish what she started years ago."

Mark Bravo: "And when she won the Women's Championship, it felt like everything had come full circle."

The screen cuts to Amy Harrison rushing down.

Not as an enemy.

As an old friend.

As a woman who had once stood beside her through an older era, an older war, an older version of this division.

Amy reaches the ring.

She looks at Marie.

Marie looks back.

And for one second it feels like history is healing.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison came down like she was there to celebrate with Marie."

Mark Bravo: "Like she was there for the moment. Like she was there for her."

Then the footage hits.

Amy turns on Marie.

Violently.

Without warning.

Without mercy.

The package freezes on Marie down on the mat and Amy standing over her.

John Phillips: "Instead, she turned on her."

Mark Bravo: "And that one question echoed through the whole company..."

John Phillips: "Why, Amy? Why?"

The music swells now, darker.

The package begins moving through the wreckage that followed.

Amy Harrison didn't just betray Marie Van Claudio.

She built something on top of that betrayal.

Something cruel.

Something powerful.

Something controlling.

John Phillips: "Amy did not stop at one act of betrayal."

Mark Bravo: "No. She took that moment and turned it into a throne."

Images flash.

Amy manipulating people.

Amy rising.

Amy winning the Women's Championship at Great Southern Trendkill in a four-way over Valkyrie Knoxx, Susanita Ybanez, and Marie Van Claudio.

Amy with gold.

Amy smiling.

Amy becoming more and more dangerous with every second of control.

John Phillips: "At Great Southern Trendkill, Amy Harrison won the Women's Championship."

Mark Bravo: "And after that? It stopped being about survival. It became about empire."

The package now shows the rise of The Empire.

Not just a group.

A system.

Amy in the center.

Others around her.

Orders given.

Loyalty demanded.

Interference.

Power plays.

The title protected not just by the champion, but by a machine built to keep her there.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison's reign became one of controversy, manipulation, and control."

Mark Bravo: "And the more power she got, the more she made sure everybody around her understood one thing..."

Mark Bravo: "You exist for her."

But the package shifts.

Because Marie did not disappear.

She fought back.

She gathered herself.

She stood through the pressure.

She kept coming.

And at Seasons Beatings, she got her moment.

Marie Van Claudio forcing Amy Harrison to tap out.

The Women's Championship back in her hands.

The heartbreak of ten years finally answered.

John Phillips: "At Seasons Beatings, Marie Van Claudio made Amy Harrison submit and reclaimed the Women's Championship."

Mark Bravo: "That should've been the ending. That should've been the closing shot. But with those two? It never stays over."

The music changes again.

Less triumphant.

More poisonous.

Because losing the Women's Championship did not humble Amy Harrison.

It made her meaner.

Sharper.

More obsessed.

The package rolls through No Love Lost.

Amy challenging Marie for the Women's Championship.

Two women with too much history to pretend this was only about the title.

John Phillips: "At No Love Lost, Amy came for the Women's Championship again."

Mark Bravo: "Because Amy Harrison doesn't believe anything belongs to anybody else for long."

Shots of the match flicker across the screen.

Marie enduring.

Amy pressing.

Both women carrying years into every exchange.

John Phillips: "Marie said it herself. This wasn't just another defense."

Mark Bravo: "No. This was history putting gloves back on."

Then the package begins showing the next fracture.

Not between Amy and Marie.

Within Amy's own house.

Tension inside The Empire.

Dahlia Cross.

Selena Vex.

Rosa Delgado.

Amy cutting people loose.

Amy discarding them.

Amy treating loyalty like a resource that existed only to be spent and replaced.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison didn't just make enemies of Marie Van Claudio."

Mark Bravo: "She made enemies of the women who once stood beside her too."

The package shows Rosa and Selena processing the betrayal. Dahlia Cross storming into frame. Frustration. Hurt. Anger. The realization spreading that Amy never built family. She built shields.

John Phillips: "Rosa Delgado. Selena Vex. Dahlia Cross. One by one, the old Empire started to understand exactly what Amy Harrison was."

Mark Bravo: "A user. A manipulator. A woman who only keeps people around until she finds a shinier weapon."

Then Marie steps into that story too.

Not to erase the past.

Not to suddenly become best friends with women she has fought before.

But to speak a truth none of them could ignore.

John Phillips: "Marie Van Claudio said there was no love lost between any of them."

Mark Bravo: "But she also knew Amy better than anybody."

Quick cuts now.

Marie standing with Rosa, Selena, and Dahlia.

Marie saying Amy is a manipulator.

Marie saying Amy makes serving her feel like standing beside her.

Marie saying what Amy did to them was not right.

And then the line.

Marie Van Claudio: "We fight back."

The screen cuts to black on that.

Then explodes back into color.

The New Empire.

Amy Harrison with Trey Mack, Clovis Black, and Valkyrie Knox.

The old Empire on the other side.

The war widening around the two women at the center of it.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison moved on from The Empire..."

Mark Bravo: "And built The New Empire."

John Phillips: "More gold. More control. More arrogance."

Mark Bravo: "And somehow, even less humanity."

The video now rolls into Victory.

Amy in the New Empire locker room.

Amy mocking Valentina Blaze.

Amy bragging that Trey and Clovis hold the Tag Team Championships.

Amy admiring the International Championship at her waist.

Amy looking at Valkyrie Knox and promising that soon she'll have gold too.

Amy Harrison: "Now to just get gold on Valkyrie and we will run the UTA!"

Then Marie appears.

Champion on her shoulder.

Smirk on her face.

Ice in her voice.

Marie Van Claudio: "I wouldn't get too ahead of yourself."

John Phillips: "Marie never let Amy get comfortable."

Mark Bravo: "No. She became the one thing Amy hates most..."

Mark Bravo: "A reminder."

The package shows Marie stepping in close, looking at the International Championship, telling Amy at Victorious she's going to have to vacate that little belt.

Amy clutching it.

Amy alarmed.

Amy furious.

John Phillips: "For all her confidence, Amy Harrison did not like hearing that."

Mark Bravo: "Because underneath all the bragging? She knows Marie is still the one woman in this company who can

drag all of that confidence into deep water."

Now the package cuts to the dressing room confrontation.

Amy with the New Empire.

Marie bursting in with Rosa, Selena, and Dahlia behind her.

Tension everywhere.

No love lost anywhere.

John Phillips: "Then came the confrontation that finally made this official."

Quick shots.

Marie telling Amy they end this.

Amy mocking her.

Marie saying there's only room for one of them.

Amy ridiculing the Women's Championship.

Amy calling it worthless.

Amy saying no one cares about Marie's title anymore.

Mark Bravo: "That's Amy Harrison in a sentence. She doesn't just want to beat you. She wants to define what matters and tell you that you never did."

The package slows now for the stipulation reveal.

John Phillips: "Marie wanted the match."

Mark Bravo: "Amy wanted the terms."

Amy proposing the Lumberjill stipulation.

Nowhere to run. Nowhere to hide.

Both teams on the outside.

The old Empire. The New Empire.

The past and the present surrounding the ring while the two women at the center finally collide.

John Phillips: "A Lumberjill Match."

Mark Bravo: "Which means this war has nowhere to spill but everywhere around it."

But Amy wasn't finished.

The package goes quiet.

Just enough for the next line to land like a blade.

Amy Harrison: "If I lose... I'll gladly vacate my International Championship."

The shot lingers on Marie.

Then Amy again.

Amy Harrison: "If you lose..."

Amy Harrison: "I want your servitude."

The music hits harder.

Now the package becomes a storm of imagery.

Amy smiling.

Marie staring her down.

Rosa saying don't agree to that.

Dahlia saying no.

Selena warning her.

Marie not backing down.

John Phillips: "That's what this became."

John Phillips: "Not just pride. Not just titles. Not just revenge."

John Phillips: "Control."

Mark Bravo: "Amy wants to own Marie. That's the sickness in this thing. She doesn't just want to beat her. She wants to humiliate her, command her, break her down into something smaller."

And Marie?

Marie stepping forward anyway.

Marie accepting anyway.

Marie saying the line that ties the whole story together.

Marie Van Claudio: "I'm not going to lose."

The package now becomes montage.

Marie winning the Women's Championship.

Amy rushing down.

Amy turning on her.

Amy winning the Women's Championship months later.

The Empire growing.

Marie making Amy tap at Seasons Beatings.

Amy becoming more vicious.

The old Empire fractured.

The New Empire rising.

Marie refusing to yield.

Amy mocking the title.

Marie promising Amy's days are numbered.

Servitude versus Championship.

Lumberjill Match.

One more war.

John Phillips: "They built this division together in fire."

Mark Bravo: "And tonight they try to burn the other one out of it for good."

The final split-screen hits.

Marie Van Claudio with the Women's Championship over her shoulder.

Amy Harrison with the International Championship around her waist.

Both women staring straight ahead.

No blinking.

No softness.

No room for the other.

John Phillips: "One woman walks out with her freedom intact."

Mark Bravo: "And one woman walks out having lost more than a match."

UP NEXT

AMY HARRISON vs. MARIE VAN CLAUDIO

LUMBERJILL MATCH

SERVITUDE vs. CHAMPIONSHIP

The package ends on Marie's face.

Then Amy's.

Then black.

Amy Harrison vs. Marie Van Claudio

Match

We return to ringside.

And the atmosphere has changed again.

The shock from what happened to Chris Ross and Maxx Mayhem still lingers in the air, but now the arena is trying to refocus itself. Trying to breathe again. Trying to understand that somehow, after all of that chaos, there is still a main event to come.

John Phillips: "Ladies and gentlemen, it is time for our main event."

Mark Bravo: "And after everything we just witnessed, that is saying something. But this one? This one has had a target on it for a long time."

The camera sweeps the floor around ringside.

The independent lumberjills are already in position, circling the ring and creating a living wall around the action-to-come.

Angela Hall.

Athena Storm.

Nancy Rhodes.

On one side of the divide, women with no formal alliance to Marie Van Claudio, but no love at all for Amy Harrison.

Across from them, Juno Sage. Kaida Shizuka. Shannon Ray.

Women with no allegiance to Amy in name, but every reason in the world to enjoy what happens if Marie falls.

John Phillips: "And for anyone watching who may not know the exact stipulation, this is a Lumberjill Match."

Mark Bravo: "Right. Two women in the ring. Everybody else on the floor. If somebody gets thrown outside, where they land matters. Depending on whose side they hit, they might get helped, attacked, or thrown right back in."

John Phillips: "In theory, everyone outside should be women, hence the Lumberjill name..."

Mark Bravo: "But as we know tonight, theory and reality don't always match up."

The camera catches the empty side where Amy Harrison's people have not yet come out. The tension there is obvious. Because everyone already knows Trey Mack, Clovis Black, and Valkyrie Knox are coming. And when they do, this ringside area is going to become a powder keg.

Then the lights dim.

The opening notes of "Forever & Ever" by Lacey Sturm featuring Lindsey Stirling hit the speakers.

The crowd rises.

John Phillips: "Here she comes."

Mark Bravo: "And that reaction tells you everything you need to know. Marie Van Claudio still matters around here. Maybe more than ever."

A warm gold-and-white glow spreads across the arena as the violin begins to sing through the speakers. Then Marie Van Claudio steps onto the stage with the UTA Women's Championship resting proudly on her shoulder.

The ovation is immediate.

Loud.

Full.

Earned.

She pauses at the top of the ramp and lets the moment breathe.

Not because she is soaking in glory.

Because she understands the weight of this walk.

This is not just another entrance.

This is the walk into one more war with the woman who has haunted her for months.

John Phillips: "The UTA Women's Champion. The First Lady of the UTA. Marie Van Claudio."

Mark Bravo: "And look at her. No panic. No fear. She knows exactly what this is. She knows what Amy wants from her tonight."

Then more figures emerge behind her.

Dahlia Cross.

Selena Vex.

Rosa Delgado.

The women who once stood within Amy Harrison's orbit, now walking behind Marie Van Claudio into the final chapter of this particular stretch of the war.

John Phillips: "And here come Dahlia Cross, Selena Vex, and Rosa Delgado."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and they're not walking Marie to the ring as friends exactly. They're walking out here because Amy Harrison made enemies faster than she could keep allies."

Marie starts down the ramp, championship over her shoulder, expression proud but serious. She looks straight ahead. Not at the crowd. Not at the lumberjills. Straight ahead to the ring where this ends one way or another.

Behind her, Dahlia, Selena, and Rosa follow with their own separate energy.

Dahlia looks intense, jaw set, like she has waited too long for the chance to stand opposite Amy without pretending.

Selena looks cold and focused, all business now that the old lies have been stripped away.

Rosa carries anger in every step, the kind that never fully left after realizing what Amy Harrison thought of her loyalty.

John Phillips: "This is such a layered walk to the ring. You've got Marie Van Claudio, the champion, the face of the division, and behind her the fallout of Amy Harrison's own choices."

Mark Bravo: "And that's the thing. Amy created this. The women at her back tonight? Some of them are only standing there because she drove them into opposition."

Halfway down the aisle, Marie stops.

Just for a second.

She lifts the Women's Championship off her shoulder and raises it high with one hand.

The crowd erupts again.

John Phillips: "Marie Van Claudio raising that championship for everyone here to see."

Mark Bravo: "And she better hold onto it tight, because if Amy gets her way, tonight isn't just about losing a match. It's about losing control of your whole damn life."

Marie lowers the title and continues down the ramp. At ringside, the non-aligned lumberjills watch carefully as she approaches. Angela Hall gives a small nod of respect. Athena Storm watches with intensity. Nancy Rhodes applauds once, almost involuntarily. Across the way, Juno Sage rolls her eyes. Kaida Shizuka remains unreadable. Shannon Ray smirks with open skepticism.

Dahlia, Selena, and Rosa split off at ringside, each taking their places among the lumberjills, but clearly positioned to represent Marie's side of this volatile equation.

John Phillips: "And now Dahlia Cross, Selena Vex, and Rosa Delgado join the Lumberjills."

Mark Bravo: "Which means ringside just got even more dangerous. Because wherever Amy ends up, somebody down there's gonna have an opinion about it."

Marie remains alone as she reaches the steps.

Champion.

One hand on the title.

Eyes up.

Focused.

Unshaken.

She climbs the steps and pauses on the apron, staring across the ring and out toward the entranceway, waiting for

Amy Harrison to appear.

John Phillips: "The champion is in position."

Mark Bravo: "And now all that's left is the other half of this powder keg."

Marie steps through the ropes and into the ring. She walks to the center and turns in a slow circle, taking in the women around ringside, the ropes, the corners, the terrain, the danger. She knows what a Lumberjill Match is. She knows one bad spill to the floor can change everything.

Then she stops.

And looks back to the stage.

Ready.

Waiting.

The main event has begun to form.

Marie Van Claudio stands alone in the ring now, the Women's Championship over her shoulder, eyes fixed on the stage. Around ringside, the Lumberjills are in place already, but there is one side of this powder keg still missing.

John Phillips: "The champion is ready."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, but now comes the woman who never arrives alone if she can help it."

The lights drop into a colder palette.

Pink.

Blue.

Black.

The eerie opening chords of "Sanctify Me" by In This Moment hit the arena.

The boos are instant.

Loud.

Sustained.

Venomous.

John Phillips: "And here she comes."

Mark Bravo: "Listen to this place. They cannot stand her, and honestly? I get it."

Amy Harrison steps through the curtain.

The International Championship is around her waist.

Her chin is high.

Her posture is regal.

Her expression says the hatred belongs to her.

She pauses at the top of the stage and lets the boos wash over her, not shrinking from them, not hurrying through them, but soaking them in like proof that the room still moves when she does.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison, the self-proclaimed Empress, entering this Lumberjill main event with more than just pride on the line."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. If she loses, that International Championship is gone. But if Marie loses? Servitude. That's what Amy wants. Ownership. Control. Humiliation."

Amy slowly flicks her hair back and turns her head just enough toward the ring to see Marie already waiting for her. The smirk that forms is immediate and ugly. Not because she's happy to see the champion.

Because she likes the idea of what tonight could do to her.

Then the rest of her side emerges.

First Valkyrie Knox.

Cold.

Still.

Unreadable.

She steps out like a blade drawn slowly from velvet, not playing to the crowd, not acknowledging anyone, just walking with that quiet menace that always seems to make the air around her feel narrower.

John Phillips: "And there is Valkyrie Knox."

Mark Bravo: "Which means whatever Amy's planning, she brought one of the most dangerous women in UTA to help make it happen."

Then come the men.

Trey Mack.

Clovis Black.

The final Lumberjacks in this so-called Lumberjill match, and their presence changes the look of ringside immediately.

Trey walks with swagger, bouncing lightly, all smooth confidence and easy arrogance, like the heat from the fans only sharpens his grin. Clovis follows without flourish, without expression, a looming wall of silence behind him that makes Trey's charisma feel even louder.

John Phillips: "And here come Trey Mack and Clovis Black to join the outside of this match as well."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, and let's just say it plain: the term Lumberjill is getting bent pretty hard tonight. But that's what Amy wanted. Amy wanted the New Empire here. Amy wanted force at ringside. Amy wanted every possible edge."

Now the full picture is in place.

Amy Harrison in front.

Valkyrie Knox to one side.

Trey Mack and Clovis Black just behind.

The New Empire walking together.

Not as a backup plan.

As a threat.

John Phillips: "There is no mistaking what this looks like."

Mark Bravo: "No. This isn't support. This is an entourage built to intimidate."

Amy begins her walk down the ramp with that same seductive confidence she always carries, each step measured, each glance chosen, each movement meant to project control. She pats the International Championship at her waist

once, then points toward Marie in the ring as if to remind her what she's already holding before she tries to take something else.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison carrying herself like she already owns the ending."

Mark Bravo: "That's because in her mind, she probably does."

But the closer they get to ringside, the more the reality of the stipulation settles over the whole scene.

Because now the non-aligned women already in place begin reacting too.

Angela Hall squares her shoulders the moment Amy comes into view.

Athena Storm folds her arms, disgust obvious in her face.

Nancy Rhodes watches with open disdain.

Across from them, Juno Sage almost looks entertained.

Kaida Shizuka remains cool and unreadable.

Shannon Ray smirks as though she's very interested to see just how ugly this gets.

Dahlia Cross, Selena Vex, and Rosa Delgado all lock in on Amy's group from the moment they near the floor.

No words.

No smiles.

No pretending.

Just tension.

John Phillips: "Look at ringside now. You can see all the fault lines. The New Empire on one side. Marie's backing on another. And then the women in the middle who don't officially belong to either camp but absolutely have preferences."

Mark Bravo: "That's what makes this match dangerous. The ring is one battlefield. The floor is another one entirely."

Amy stops halfway down the ramp.

Turns toward the ring.

And slowly unfastens the International Championship from around her waist.

The boos intensify as she raises it up with both hands, showing it off not to the crowd, but to Marie.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison making sure Marie sees exactly what's at stake."

Mark Bravo: "And Marie's looking right through it. That's the thing I love here. Amy wants all the pageantry. Marie just wants the fight."

Amy lowers the title and hands it off, never once breaking eye contact with Marie. Then she resumes the walk. Valkyrie, Trey, and Clovis split as they near ringside, each peeling off to their places among the Lumberjills and jacks, but the message remains the same: Amy does not come to a war without making sure the battlefield already tilts in her favor.

John Phillips: "And now Valkyrie Knoxx, Trey Mack, and Clovis Black take their places outside the ring."

Mark Bravo: "Which means if Marie gets thrown to the wrong side tonight, it could get ugly in a hurry."

Amy reaches the steel steps and stops there for one more pose, one hand on the post, the other brushing her hair back, almost as if this is a red carpet event instead of the culmination of months of resentment, betrayal, and psychological warfare.

Inside the ring, Marie Van Claudio does not move.

She just watches.

Unblinking.

Unamused.

Ready.

John Phillips: "The champion has not taken her eyes off Amy for a second."

Mark Bravo: "Because she knows exactly what she's looking at. Amy Harrison isn't walking to the ring. She's walking to the scene of a crime she's already picturing."

Amy ascends the steps, then steps onto the apron and leans through the ropes just enough to stare directly at Marie from across the ring. Her lips move. No microphone. No need. Whatever she says is meant only for the woman waiting inside.

Marie answers with nothing but a step forward.

That gets a reaction.

Amy smiles.

Then finally, she enters the ring.

The main event picture is complete now.

Marie Van Claudio.

Amy Harrison.

The ring surrounded by allies, enemies, opportunists, and weapons in human form.

John Phillips: "There they are. Champion and challenger. Marie Van Claudio and Amy Harrison."

Mark Bravo: "And there is no escaping what this has become. No running. No hiding. No retreating to the floor without consequences."

Amy backs into her corner and slowly spreads her arms, chin high, surrounded by all the poison she's built around herself. Marie remains in the center, title on her shoulder, all resolve and all fight.

The main event has arrived.

Amy Harrison has entered the ring.

Marie Van Claudio is already there.

And for a long moment...

Nothing happens.

No bell.

No lockup.

No rush.

Just tension.

Heavy.

Electric.

The kind that makes an arena full of people forget how loud they were a second ago.

John Phillips: "Listen to this building."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. They feel it."

The hard camera pulls back and lets the whole thing breathe.

Marie Van Claudio in one half of the frame, Women's Championship still over her shoulder.

Amy Harrison in the other, chin up, face smug, eyes sharp, every bit the woman who believes she has already warped the division around her own image.

And outside the ring?

The real danger.

Trey Mack.

Clovis Black.

Valkyrie Knoxx.

Dahlia Cross.

Selena Vex.

Rosa Delgado.

Angela Hall.

Athena Storm.

Juno Sage.

Kaida Shizuka.

Nancy Rhodes.

Shannon Ray.

Every side of the ring lined with women, allegiances, grudges, egos, agendas, and just enough barely-contained hostility to make one spill to the floor feel like the start of a riot.

John Phillips: "This is what a Lumberjill match is supposed to be. No escape. No safe side. No easy reset."

Mark Bravo: "And tonight, one false move could set off all of it. One bad spill, one cheap shove, one wrong landing on the wrong side of the ring... and this whole thing can go sideways in a heartbeat."

The referee stands between them for the moment, but even that feels symbolic more than protective. There is only so much one person can do when a war has this many witnesses standing arm's reach away.

Marie slowly removes the Women's Championship from her shoulder.

She does not hold it up.

Not yet.

She just grips it in both hands and stares across at Amy with the look of a woman who has carried this title like proof, like purpose, like validation, and knows that tonight it is also bait.

John Phillips: "Look at Marie Van Claudio."

John Phillips: "She knows what tonight means."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. This ain't just a defense. This ain't just another chapter. This is the chapter where it all cashes in one way or the other."

Because that is the truth of it.

This is what it all comes down to.

Marie Van Claudio fights tonight to do more than retain the Women's Championship, which is not actually on the line.

She fights to force Amy Harrison to vacate the International Championship.

She fights to strip away the symbol Amy has wrapped herself in.

She fights to remind the whole division that power borrowed through manipulation is not the same thing as leadership earned through fire.

John Phillips: "Marie Van Claudio is fighting to make Amy Harrison give up that International Championship."

Mark Bravo: "And more than that, she's fighting to prove Amy doesn't get to keep stacking power on top of poison."

But Amy Harrison is not here for a title consolidation. Not really.

No.

She is here for domination.

She is here to own the ending.

To own the image.

To own Marie.

John Phillips: "And Amy Harrison..."

Mark Bravo: "Amy Harrison isn't fighting for just a win. Let's cut the crap. She wants Marie Van Claudio as her slave."

The crowd reacts immediately to that word.

Loudly.

Angrily.

Because it is ugly.

Because it is supposed to be ugly.

Mark Bravo: "That's what this is. Servitude? Contractual obligation? Dress it up however you want. Amy wants ownership. She wants humiliation. She wants Marie under her thumb forever, and she wants the whole division to watch it happen."

John Phillips: "That is the sickness in Amy Harrison. She does not just want to beat Marie Van Claudio. She wants to break her and then put her on display."

Amy smiles from her corner as if she can hear every bit of the disgust coming from the building and takes it as confirmation that people understand the stakes exactly the way she wants them to.

She lifts one hand and motions around her own waist, then points at Marie, then points at the mat between them, as if to say this was always inevitable. As if the division itself has always been heading toward this exact collision.

John Phillips: "And then there is the other thing hanging over all of this."

Mark Bravo: "Who's the face of the division."

That lands.

Because that is the real wound beneath all the others.

That is the question that has followed both women across years, titles, betrayals, returns, alliances, and wars.

Marie Van Claudio, the First Lady of the UTA.

The woman who carried the old division, came back when she didn't have to, and fought to make this title matter again.

Or Amy Harrison, the manipulator, the architect, the usurper, the woman who believes control is the same thing as legitimacy if she can hold it long enough.

John Phillips: "They are not just fighting over stipulations tonight."

John Phillips: "They are fighting over identity."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. One of these women wants to be remembered as the face of the whole damn division. The other one refuses to let that happen."

Marie hands the Women's Championship to the referee now.

Amy watches the belt with contempt.

Marie watches it like a vow.

John Phillips: "The UTA Women's Championship not on the line."

Mark Bravo: "But Amy Harrison's International Championship hanging in the balance. She loses, she vacates it. Period."

John Phillips: "But that still may not be the heaviest thing at stake."

Mark Bravo: "No. Because the heaviest thing at stake is a life. A name. A career. Dignity. That's what Amy's trying to take."

The referee takes the title and steps back, still waiting, because even he seems to understand that ringing the bell too quickly would feel like disrespecting the moment. This is too big. Too personal. Too loaded to be hurried.

Marie steps out from her corner.

Not all the way.

Just enough.

Amy answers with a step of her own.

Now they are closer.

Still not touching.

Still not throwing.

But close enough that the cameras can catch every detail.

Marie's jaw set.

Amy's eyes glittering.

No smiles now.

No games.

Not for this second.

John Phillips: "This is huge."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. This is bigger than a main event. This is the kind of moment that defines what comes next for the whole division."

Outside the ring, everyone else feels it too.

Dahlia Cross has stopped moving entirely.

Selena Vex's eyes never leave Amy.

Rosa Delgado looks ready to spring at the first excuse.

Valkyrie Knoxx stands like a statue, all threat, no wasted motion.

Trey Mack smirks, but even that smirk has a tension to it.

Clovis Black looks like the floor around him belongs to him already.

The independent names at ringside watch from both sides, each of them understanding that one slide under the bottom rope in the wrong direction could force them to choose whether they are helping, hurting, or hurling someone back into the fire.

John Phillips: "There is nowhere to hide tonight."

Mark Bravo: "Nope. Not in the ring. Not on the floor. Not in the story. Not in the aftermath."

Marie and Amy are nose to nose now.

The camera gets tight.

You can see Amy say something under her breath.

You can see Marie's expression harden further.

You can feel the crowd leaning in.

Still waiting.

Still holding itself back.

Because once the bell rings, all of this finally has to become physical.

And after everything that brought them here...

there may be no clean way back from it.

The camera stays tight on their faces.

Marie Van Claudio.

Amy Harrison.

Nose to nose.

Neither woman blinking.

Neither woman backing away.

The ring feels too small for all the history standing inside it.

John Phillips: "One more reminder as this moment hangs in the air... the UTA Women's Championship is not on the line tonight."

Mark Bravo: "No, and honestly that almost makes this worse. Because this isn't about a title defense. This is about

power, humiliation, and who owns the future of the women's division."

The referee tries to step in, but even he hesitates for just a second, as though some small part of him understands this is bigger than his hand signals and instructions. Marie and Amy are locked into the kind of stare that only happens when both women know exactly who the other is and exactly what it would mean to lose here.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison loses, and that International Championship is gone from her waist."

Mark Bravo: "Marie Van Claudio loses, and Amy gets what she really wants. Not a belt. Not a win. Ownership."

The crowd boos again at the thought of it.

Amy hears them and smiles faintly.

Marie does not.

She just keeps staring through her.

John Phillips: "And make no mistake, both women still believe this is about being the face of the division."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. Marie thinks Amy corrupted it. Amy thinks Marie is living off an old reputation. Tonight, one of them gets ammunition for that argument forever."

Amy says something quietly now, lips barely moving, voice lost beneath the noise of the arena. But whatever it is, it lands. Marie's nostrils flare. Her shoulders square even tighter. Her eyes narrow with fresh disgust.

Then Marie answers.

Short.

Cold.

Just enough for Amy's smirk to flicker.

Mark Bravo: "Whatever was just said there, it got through."

John Phillips: "This has been simmering for too long not to."

Outside the ring, the tension spreads.

Dahlia Cross inches one step closer to the apron without even realizing she's done it.

Selena Vex folds her arms tighter.

Rosa Delgado looks ready to climb through the ropes on instinct alone if things go south fast enough.

Across from them, Valkyrie Knoxx remains absolutely still, but Trey Mack and Clovis Black both shift their footing, already preparing for the kind of chaos that could spill off the canvas the second one woman gets launched the wrong direction.

John Phillips: "You can feel everybody at ringside wanting to be involved and trying not to be."

Mark Bravo: "That's the danger of this match. Nobody out there is neutral. Even the ones without official sides have preferences."

The referee finally finds his voice and motions the two women back.

Referee: "Back up. Both of you. Back to your corners."

Neither moves at first.

The crowd buzzes louder.

Amy's eyes never leave Marie's.

Marie's eyes never leave Amy's.

Then Amy slowly takes a backward step.

Not out of respect.

Out of confidence.

Like she wants the bell now.

Like she wants the whole thing to finally become official because she believes official favors her.

Marie waits one extra beat before taking her own step back.

The crowd responds to that too.

John Phillips: "Finally, some separation."

Mark Bravo: "Barely. You could still light a match on the heat between them."

Amy backs into her corner and slowly stretches her neck from side to side, one hand brushing the ropes, eyes still fixed on Marie like a predator that has already pictured the kill. Marie backs into hers and rolls one shoulder, then the other, never taking her eyes off the woman across the ring.

The referee looks left.

Looks right.

Looks to the floor.

Every Lumberjill and jack in place.

Every side accounted for.

Every possible bad decision waiting for a chance to become worse.

John Phillips: "This is it."

Mark Bravo: "No more videos. No more threats. No more dressing room deals. No more talking."

The referee raises his hand.

The crowd rises with it.

And now, finally, after all the waiting, all the breathing, all the tension and poison and history...

the bell is ready to ring.

The referee looks from one corner to the other one last time.

Marie Van Claudio stands poised, hands loose at her sides, chin lifted, all confidence and control. Across from her, Amy Harrison bounces once on the balls of her feet with that same smug energy radiating off her, all ego, all mouth, all certainty that this ring exists to validate whatever she already believes about herself.

John Phillips: "And here we go."

DING DING DING!

The bell rings.

The crowd erupts.

But neither woman rushes.

Not yet.

Marie steps out of her corner first, measured and calm, every inch of her body language saying she came here ready for this exact kind of fight. Amy steps forward too, but with much more performance to it, shoulders rolling, lips moving, already talking before they have even touched.

Amy Harrison: "C'mon, Marie. C'mon. This is your big moment, right?"

Mark Bravo: "There she goes. Mouth already running."

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison never misses a chance to make every second about herself."

Amy throws her arms out and flashes a theatrical smile toward the crowd, then toward the women at ringside, then right back to Marie.

Amy Harrison: "You better make this count, sweetheart. You don't get many last stands."

Marie says nothing.

She just keeps walking forward.

Eyes locked in.

Focused.

Unbothered by the noise because she knows that with Amy Harrison, the noise is often the point.

John Phillips: "That's the contrast right there. Amy wants to control the room. Marie wants to control the fight."

They circle now.

Slowly.

Amy keeps talking.

Amy Harrison: "You know what I love?"

Amy Harrison: "Everybody out there still thinking you matter more than me."

Amy Harrison: "That's adorable."

Marie finally answers, but only with a look. It is calm, sharp, and just amused enough to clearly irritate Amy more than any shouted comeback would.

Mark Bravo: "Ooh, yeah. Marie not giving her the argument she wants."

Amy reaches up and motions as if to invite a lockup, but her grin makes it clear she thinks even the idea is beneath her. Marie steps in anyway and the two finally collide in a collar-and-elbow tie-up in the center of the ring.

John Phillips: "First contact."

Marie immediately gets the better base, driving forward with more balance than force, forcing Amy to give a step, then another. Amy tries to dig in, tries to turn the angle, but Marie keeps walking her backward until Amy's shoulders brush the ropes.

Referee: "Break! Break clean!"

Marie lets go immediately and takes a step back.

Amy, however, makes sure to stay close just long enough to smirk in Marie's face before lazily raising her hands.

Amy Harrison: "That all you got?"

Marie's response is a tiny shake of the head, like she almost can't believe Amy still thinks this is a game she can talk her way through.

Mark Bravo: "Marie won that first exchange easy."

Amy pushes off the ropes and comes out more aggressively this time, circling faster, then darting in with another tie-up attempt. Marie meets her again and this time transitions immediately into a side headlock, snapping it on tight and grounding the challenger in one smooth motion.

John Phillips: "Beautiful transition by Marie Van Claudio."

Amy grimaces and tries to shove her off, but Marie cranks the hold tighter and turns with her, making Amy work for every inch. The crowd roars with approval while outside the ring the floor begins to lean in closer, all those surrounding figures watching for any chance that this thing might spill their way.

Amy Harrison: "Get off me!"

Mark Bravo: "Amy doesn't like being out-wrestled this early. Especially not when it makes her look small."

Amy finally gets enough leverage to shoot Marie off into the ropes. Marie rebounds. Amy drops down too early, expecting the pass. Marie checks up, steps over her instead, and Amy has to scramble back to her feet as Marie turns and stares her down again.

The crowd pops for that too.

John Phillips: "Marie one step ahead."

Amy Harrison: "Cute."

Amy says it through clenched teeth now.

Less playful.

More annoyed.

Marie motions for her to come on.

Not taunting.

Inviting.

Like a woman who knows she is already in the challenger's head and is perfectly content to let her stay there.

Mark Bravo: "That right there? That's confidence. Amy's got ego. Marie's got control."

Amy storms forward a third time, but now there is more irritation in her movement, less calculation. They tie up again and Amy tries to muscle straight through this one, only for Marie to pivot beautifully and slip behind into a waistlock. Amy panics for half a second and throws a back elbow. Marie ducks it, keeps the waistlock, and pops the hips for a quick takedown that sends Amy to the mat on her backside.

John Phillips: "Down goes Amy!"

The crowd explodes as Amy scrambles backward on instinct, one hand planted behind her, the other pointing at Marie like this was somehow a cheap trick instead of simply being outclassed in the opening minute.

Amy Harrison: "Oh, that's how you want it? Fine. Fine!"

Mark Bravo: "Amy already complaining to the air."

Marie doesn't lunge in. She doesn't let the moment get sloppy. She stays composed, keeps her distance, and waits for Amy to stand, every inch the confident champion even if the title itself isn't what's on the line tonight.

John Phillips: "Marie Van Claudio could not ask for a better start. Focused. composed. in control. And Amy Harrison is already getting louder, which is never a great sign for her."

Amy gets back to her feet, face twisted with equal parts irritation and disbelief that the opening of this match is not unfolding around her the way she imagined. She wipes her mouth, squares up again, and this time smiles a thinner, meaner smile.

Amy Harrison: "Okay, Marie."

Amy Harrison: "Now I'm awake."

The crowd reacts to that line because they know what it means.

The match has started.

The ego has been bruised.

And now Amy Harrison is about to stop playing nice.

Amy Harrison resets her stance and slowly wipes at the corner of her mouth, eyes narrowed now, smile thinner and far less playful. Across from her, Marie Van Claudio remains composed, hands up, posture balanced, not overcommitting, not chasing the moment just because the opening exchanges went her way.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison said she's awake now, and that may not be good news for anybody."

Mark Bravo: "Nope. Because when Amy stops trying to look clever and starts trying to be dangerous, that's usually when things get ugly."

Outside the ring, the lumberjills and jacks are already reacting to every shift.

Dahlia Cross watches like she's trying not to blink.

Selena Vex and Rosa Delgado hover nearest Marie's side of the floor, both tense, both clearly ready if this spills their direction.

Across from them, Valkyrie Knox stands perfectly still, arms folded, giving away nothing. Trey Mack leans forward with a grin, clearly enjoying any second where Amy gets meaner. Clovis Black says nothing, but his eyes track Marie like he is measuring what kind of damage one bad bounce out of the ring might allow.

The unaffiliated women complete the circle: Angela Hall, Athena Storm, and Nancy Rhodes all visibly leaning toward Marie; Juno Sage, Kaida Shizuka, and Shannon Ray looking much more entertained by Amy's side of the equation.

John Phillips: "And this is where the Lumberjill stipulation keeps hovering over every exchange. They are never really alone in there."

Mark Bravo: "Exactly. Every head turn matters. Every stumble toward the ropes matters. You don't just have to beat the woman in front of you tonight. You have to know where the hell you're standing."

Amy suddenly steps in fast again, but this time she doesn't go high for another conventional tie-up. She feints up and snaps a quick toe kick into Marie's stomach.

Mark Bravo: "There it is."

Marie folds just enough for Amy to pounce, grabbing a handful of hair and trying to yank her downward into a front facelock. The crowd boos immediately.

Referee: "Watch the hair! Watch the hair!"

Amy ignores him, of course, and pulls Marie into a quick snapmare, trying to drag the pace out of the champion and force this into her kind of ugly. Marie flips over and pops back up faster than Amy expects, but Amy is ready enough to

catch her with a loud knife-edge chop across the chest.

John Phillips: "Sharp chop by Amy Harrison!"

Marie winces but doesn't give much else away. Amy grins and talks immediately.

Amy Harrison: "That got your attention, didn't it?"

She swings for another. Marie blocks it this time, traps the wrist, and answers with a stiff forearm to the jaw that knocks Amy backward half a step.

Mark Bravo: "And there's the answer."

Amy comes right back with a slap to the face.

The sound snaps through the arena.

John Phillips: "Oh, come on!"

The crowd erupts in boos, and the women outside react too. Rosa Delgado takes an angry step toward the apron before Selena puts a hand out across her chest to keep her from getting involved too soon. On the opposite side, Juno Sage laughs openly while Shannon Ray claps twice like she approves of the disrespect.

Mark Bravo: "And look outside already! Rosa wanted in right there!"

John Phillips: "This thing is walking a razor's edge."

Inside the ring, Marie slowly turns her head back toward Amy after the slap, and that expression on her face shifts from calm to cold in an instant. Amy sees it and smirks like she is proud of herself for finally drawing out the more dangerous version of Marie.

Amy Harrison: "There she is."

Marie answers by lunging forward and driving Amy backward with a burst of forearms, forcing the challenger all the way to the ropes. Amy covers up and tries to roll with the barrage, but Marie keeps stepping with her, landing one, two, three hard shots until Amy is pinned against the cables.

John Phillips: "Marie Van Claudio firing back now!"

The referee steps in for the break, but Amy reaches through the ropes and grabs them with both hands, making the separation harder and messier on purpose. Marie finally backs off at four.

Referee: "Back up! Clean break!"

Marie does.

Amy doesn't waste the opening.

She springs off the ropes and immediately thumbs Marie in the eye.

John Phillips: "No!"

Mark Bravo: "That's Amy Harrison! That's exactly Amy Harrison!"

The crowd rains down hatred. Angela Hall shouts something from the floor. Athena Storm throws both hands out in disgust. Kaida Shizuka barely reacts at all, as if she always expected Amy to choose the shortest road to filth.

Marie stumbles backward, clutching at her face, and Amy charges in with a running shoulder that drives her into the corner. Amy keeps talking while grinding a forearm under Marie's chin.

Amy Harrison: "You think this division's yours?"

Amy Harrison: "You think they'd still chant for you when you're carrying my bags?"

Mark Bravo: "That mouth never stops."

Amy backs up one step and drives a knee into Marie's midsection, then another. Marie tries to cover up and turn out, but Amy grabs the wrist and whips her hard across the ring. Marie hits the opposite buckles chest-first and bounces out into a waiting boot to the stomach.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison changing the momentum here!"

Amy hooks the head and takes Marie over with a snap suplex, floating over into a quick cover.

Referee: "One!"

Marie kicks out immediately.

Mark Bravo: "Not enough, but Amy got what she wanted there. She broke the flow and dragged Marie into her mess."

Amy rises first and throws both arms out in frustration, then points at the referee like the count should have been faster. Outside the ring, Trey Mack nods and yells encouragement while Clovis remains silent. On Marie's side, Dahlia Cross paces one step left, one step right, clearly hating every second of Amy controlling the center of the ring.

John Phillips: "And everybody outside is getting more animated now."

Mark Bravo: "Because they can feel how close this always is to spilling over. One whip to the floor at the wrong angle, and somebody out there's gonna decide to play hero... or villain."

Amy grabs Marie by the hair again to drag her up, and this time Marie slaps her hand away hard enough to get a pop from the crowd. Amy comes back with a forearm. Marie answers with one of her own. Amy swings again. Marie blocks it, snaps in a side headlock, and takes Amy over with a running bulldog-style takedown to the mat, immediately recovering control just when it looked like the challenger had finally settled in.

John Phillips: "And Marie takes it right back!"

The crowd explodes as Amy rolls to a hip, startled and annoyed all over again. Marie gets to her feet first and points down at her once, like a warning more than a taunt.

Outside the ring, Nancy Rhodes pounds the apron in support. Juno Sage rolls her eyes. Valkyrie Knox remains motionless, but her eyes flick once toward Amy and then back to Marie, measuring everything.

Mark Bravo: "That's the thing about Marie. Amy can cheap-shot her, talk over her, try to humiliate her, but Marie keeps dragging the fight back to substance."

Amy rises more slowly this time, and now both women circle again, but with less patience than before. The opening feeling-out process is gone. The meanness is in it now. The outside circle of bodies is tighter now. The crowd is louder now. And the sense that this is one bad spill from chaos is getting stronger with every exchange.

John Phillips: "This match is settling in... but the danger around it is only growing."

Marie and Amy circle again in the center of the ring, but now there is far less caution in the movement. They have already felt each other out. Already tested the early control. Already traded enough cheapness and enough answers to know exactly what kind of fight this is becoming.

John Phillips: "You can feel the pace changing now."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah. The pleasantries are gone. Such as they were with Amy Harrison involved."

Amy steps in first with a forearm.

Marie answers with one of her own.

Amy fires another.

Marie plants and throws a harder one back that rocks Amy just enough to make the crowd come up again.

John Phillips: "Marie Van Claudio got the better of that exchange!"

Amy snarls and grabs at the wrist, trying to yank Marie off balance. Marie resists, twists through, and snaps Amy over with a quick arm drag that sends the challenger skidding across the canvas. Amy rolls through and pops back up fast, but Marie is already there with a dropkick to the chest that sends her backward into the ropes.

Mark Bravo: "That was clean!"

Amy catches herself on the ropes and immediately looks annoyed less by the impact than by the fact that Marie is starting to put real rhythm together. She pushes off and charges forward to reclaim it, but Marie catches her with a boot to the stomach and hooks the head for a snap DDT.

Amy fights it.

She hooks around the waist.

Plants her feet.

And drives Marie backward into the corner to break the hold.

John Phillips: "Amy got out of trouble there!"

She keeps Marie pinned in the buckles and hammers a shoulder into the ribs, then another, then one more for good measure while talking the whole time.

Amy Harrison: "You don't get to outshine me!"

Amy Harrison: "You don't get to stand over me!"

Outside the ring, Trey Mack shouts approval and slaps the apron. Rosa Delgado shouts right back from the other side. Selena Vex keeps one hand lightly out toward Rosa again, not to hold her back completely, but to keep the temperature from jumping five degrees too soon. Nearby, Angela Hall points toward Amy and yells for the referee to get in there, while Shannon Ray laughs like the whole thing is exactly the kind of ugliness she hoped for.

John Phillips: "Listen to ringside! Everybody's getting louder now!"

Mark Bravo: "Because they know what's coming. They can feel it. This thing is inching closer to the floor."

Amy whips Marie hard across the ring.

Marie hits the opposite corner and stumbles out.

Amy rushes in with a running clothesline, but Marie gets both boots up and catches her flush in the chest. Amy stumbles backward two steps, and Marie comes out of the corner firing with forearms again, driving Amy all the way toward the ropes on the camera side.

John Phillips: "Marie is pressing!"

One forearm.

Two.

Then a third that sends Amy spinning awkwardly and draping over the top rope for a second with her balance broken.

The whole arena rises.

Mark Bravo: "Ohhhh! Here we go!"

Because this is the first real tease of it.

Amy Harrison is half out of the ring.

Not fully thrown.

Not yet.

But close enough that every single person on the floor comes alive at once.

Dahlia Cross steps in instinctively, ready if Amy falls her way.

Selena Vex moves a half-step beside her.

Rosa Delgado looks downright eager.

On the opposite side, Valkyrie Knox suddenly unfolds from her stillness and takes one deliberate step toward the possible landing zone. Trey Mack points and shouts. Clovis Black doesn't say a word, but he closes distance too, looming like a problem waiting to happen.

Even the non-aligned women react.

Athena Storm leans in.

Juno Sage shifts with a grin.

Nancy Rhodes points toward Amy like she would be more than happy to see her dumped out there.

John Phillips: "And that's the danger! That's exactly the danger of this match!"

Mark Bravo: "Amy didn't even go all the way out and everybody out there already started moving!"

Marie sees it too.

She grabs at Amy's upper body, trying to force her over the ropes and spill her into the waiting storm below. The crowd is losing its mind now, knowing what that could mean this early. Amy hangs on desperately, legs kicking, hands clinging to the top rope as hard as she can.

Amy Harrison: "Get off me!"

Marie pulls again.

Amy won't go.

She slings one leg back under the bottom rope and throws a desperate elbow behind her, catching Marie high on the side of the head just enough to break the grip. Marie stumbles a half-step, and Amy drops back into the ring rather than out to the floor.

John Phillips: "Amy saved herself!"

Mark Bravo: "Barely! And everybody outside just got their first taste of what this match is gonna be!"

Amy rolls to her knees and then up to her feet in a hurry, eyes wild, immediately turning to see who moved toward her and who didn't. For just a second her focus goes to the floor, to the bodies at ringside, and Marie almost steals the opening with a sudden schoolgirl roll-up from behind.

Referee: "One! Two—!"

Amy kicks out hard.

John Phillips: "Close call!"

Amy scrambles up furious now, pointing at Marie and then at the floor like she is offended the world would even

consider letting her leave the ring on somebody else's terms. Marie rises across from her, breathing a little harder but looking encouraged, because now the match has crossed the threshold. Now they've both felt how close the floor really is.

Mark Bravo: "That changes the whole fight right there. First real tease of the outside, and now every woman and every jack out there is gonna be ten times jumpier."

Marie motions for Amy to come on again.

Amy steps forward, but more carefully now.

Less cocky.

Still loud.

Still egotistical.

But more aware.

Because for the first time tonight she has felt how quickly this ring can stop being safe.

John Phillips: "One near-spill to the outside, and suddenly this whole match feels even more dangerous than it already did."

Amy Harrison and Marie Van Claudio circle again, but the ring doesn't feel as contained as it did even a minute ago. That first near-spill changed the energy. Everybody felt it. Everybody outside the ropes reacted to it. And now nobody at ringside is standing quite as casually as before.

John Phillips: "The whole temperature of this match just changed."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because now it's real. Not that it wasn't before, but now every person around that ring has felt how close they are to becoming part of it."

Inside, Amy feints another tie-up and instead goes low again, trying for a quick kick to the thigh this time. Marie checks it with her shin and answers with a stiff forearm that drives Amy backward. Amy bumps into the ropes and immediately grabs at them, not to escape, but to stop her own momentum and keep herself from drifting too close to the wrong side of the ring again.

Mark Bravo: "Look at that. Amy's aware now. She's still arrogant, but she's aware."

Marie sees it and presses forward, but more carefully than before. Amy's still dangerous. Amy's still tricky. Marie doesn't overreach. She closes distance with jabs of her lead hand, looking to back Amy into another vulnerable position without losing her own footing.

But outside the ring, the tension is starting to grow its own legs.

On Marie's side, Rosa Delgado hasn't taken her eyes off Amy since that near-dump over the ropes. On Amy's side, Juno Sage catches that stare and smirks. Shannon Ray notices too and starts laughing under her breath like she's just waiting for somebody to make the first dumb decision.

John Phillips: "And now look outside the ring. Rosa Delgado and Juno Sage are jawing at each other."

Mark Bravo: "Yep. Knew it was comin'. You can't pack this many agendas around one ring and expect everybody to stay polite."

Rosa points across the floor.

Rosa Delgado: "Keep your mouth shut."

Juno smiles wider.

Juno Sage: "Or what?"

Selena Vex immediately turns her head toward Rosa, not to calm her exactly, but to remind her where they are and what this is supposed to be. Across from them, Athena Storm folds her arms tighter while Angela Hall steps a little closer, clearly not thrilled to hear the heel side getting louder and more comfortable. Kaida Shizuka remains calm, but her eyes flick from Rosa to Juno to the ring, measuring the fracture line as it forms.

John Phillips: "That's the first real bit of outside tension between the Lumberjills."

Mark Bravo: "And trust me, it won't be the last. Half the danger of this stipulation is the match outside the match."

Inside the ropes, Amy suddenly snaps Marie's arm and yanks her forward into a jawbreaker. Marie stumbles backward clutching at her mouth and Amy pounces with a running hairmare that flips Marie hard to the mat. Amy pops up and immediately starts yelling again.

Amy Harrison: "Stay down!"

John Phillips: "Jawbreaker into the hairmare by Amy Harrison!"

The crowd boos and Amy drinks it in, but even while she's playing to the room, her eyes keep darting toward the floor. She knows now that if this spills outside, the ring doesn't just get bigger. It gets more dangerous.

Marie pushes back up to one knee and Amy races in with a kick to the ribs, then hooks the head and drives her face-first into the middle turnbuckle. Marie bounces off and Amy grabs the wrist, clearly thinking about another whip toward the ropes.

Mark Bravo: "And now Amy's doing the same thing Marie was doing a minute ago. Both of them are trying to use the edges of the ring like a weapon."

She sends Marie toward the ropes, but Marie slows just enough to hook the top strand and stop herself short of tumbling through. Amy charges right in behind her for a clothesline, and Marie drops down at the last second, sending Amy spilling chest-first over the top rope.

Again.

Not out.

But close enough.

John Phillips: "Another near-spill!"

The reaction on the floor is instant and sharper this time.

Trey Mack takes two quick steps toward Amy's side of the ring, pointing for her to hang on. Valkyrie Knox moves with much more urgency now, her stillness finally broken for real. On the opposite side, Angela Hall steps toward the apron too, ready in case Amy tips over and lands in front of her. Rosa Delgado is halfway there already before Selena catches her by the forearm and yanks her back just enough to keep this from turning into a brawl before the actual contact happens.

Selena Vex: "Not yet."

But that little correction sparks something else.

Because Shannon Ray, seeing Selena grab Rosa back, starts clapping sarcastically.

Shannon Ray: "Oh, look at that. Keep your little team together."

Nancy Rhodes turns toward her immediately.

Nancy Rhodes: "You got something to say, say it louder."

Now Shannon steps forward.

Now Juno grins wider.

Now Athena Storm is closer too.

John Phillips: "The Lumberjills are starting to crowd each other now!"

Mark Bravo: "And that's the nightmare right there. All it takes is one person getting shoved, one hand on the wrong shoulder, one bad look held too long..."

The referee sees it from inside the ring and starts yelling outward even while Amy and Marie are still actively wrestling.

Referee: "Everybody back! Back up out there!"

No one listens much.

They don't touch yet.

But they are close enough now that the camera can catch all of it—the chest-to-chest posture, the hands low but ready, the little half-steps and shoulder turns that say this outside powder keg is getting a lot closer to ignition.

Inside the ring, Amy drops back in off the ropes and swings wildly for Marie's head. Marie ducks, catches Amy around the waist, and drives her backward into the opposite corner with enough force to knock the air out of her. Amy gasps, and Marie begins firing shoulder thrusts into the midsection.

John Phillips: "Marie Van Claudio taking advantage while the outside gets more volatile by the second!"

Dahlia Cross watches from just off the corner, jaw tight, while Kaida Shizuka drifts a little closer on the opposite side as if to ensure the numbers are right wherever Amy might end up. The battle lines are still there, but now they are beginning to blur under the pressure of the match itself.

Mark Bravo: "Nobody out there's relaxed anymore. Nobody. They all know they might be called into this at any second whether they want to be or not."

Marie pulls Amy out of the corner and snaps off a quick vertical suplex, floating into another cover.

Referee: "One! Two—"

Amy gets the shoulder up.

Marie rises again first, but even as she does, the camera catches another outside moment—Rosa and Juno still talking, Athena and Shannon closer than they were before, and Trey keeping one eye on Marie while Clovis keeps one eye on everybody else.

John Phillips: "This is becoming two matches at once."

Mark Bravo: "And if one of these women finally gets sent to the floor, all that tension we're seeing outside? It's gonna cash in fast."

Marie Van Claudio gets to her feet after the two-count and immediately reaches down for Amy Harrison again, trying to keep the pressure where she wants it. Amy, on her back, twists just enough to kick a leg loose and create some distance, then rolls toward the ropes on instinct.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison trying to create breathing room, but there's not much of it in a match like this."

Mark Bravo: "No, because the ropes don't lead to safety tonight. They lead to a mob."

Marie grabs Amy by the wrist and yanks her up. Amy comes up snarling, hair half in her face, and throws a desperate forearm that catches Marie high on the cheek. Marie absorbs it and answers with one of her own. Amy fires another.

Marie drives one back harder, then reaches for the arm and snaps Amy toward the ropes.

Amy hangs on.

Marie tries to pull her free.

Amy rakes at the hands.

The crowd boos.

Mark Bravo: "Amy doing everything she can to make this ugly."

Marie jerks the arm again and this time Amy comes off the ropes unwillingly, only to immediately try and sling Marie past her with a fast arm drag. Marie rolls through and pops back up. Amy charges in, looking for a clothesline, but Marie ducks under, hooks Amy around the waist from behind, and drives forward.

John Phillips: "Marie's got her!"

Amy kicks and twists, trying to widen her base, but Marie keeps pushing, walking her straight toward the ropes on the far side.

Amy throws an elbow back.

Misses.

Throws another.

That one clips Marie, but not enough.

Marie lowers her hips and with one final surge sends Amy tumbling through the middle rope to the floor.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison is out!"

Mark Bravo: "And now we see exactly what this stipulation is for!"

The arena explodes as Amy spills to the outside on the side where Angela Hall, Athena Storm, Nancy Rhodes, Rosa Delgado, Selena Vex, and Dahlia Cross are all nearest. Amy lands hard on a knee and a hand and barely has time to look up before the wall closes around her.

John Phillips: "No safe landing there!"

Rosa reaches her first, grabbing a fistful of hair and jerking Amy upright. The crowd roars at the sight. Amy shouts in protest and tries to pull away, but Selena steps in on the other side and drives a forearm into her upper back that folds her slightly forward.

Mark Bravo: "That's the Lumberjills doing their job! You go out, they put you right back where you belong!"

Athena Storm steps in next with a hard shove that sends Amy stumbling chest-first into the apron. Nancy Rhodes barks something at her and clubs her once between the shoulders for emphasis. Even Angela Hall gets a hand in, grabbing Amy by the arm and helping sling her back toward the ring.

John Phillips: "And every one of them is making Amy pay for ending up on that side of the ring!"

Dahlia Cross stands just a half-step back from the first contact, watching Amy get mauled with an expression that is not satisfied exactly, but not sympathetic either. When Amy turns, furious, trying to appeal to someone—anyone—Dahlia just meets her eyes and gives her one cold shove square in the shoulder that sends her under the bottom rope and back into the ring.

Mark Bravo: "Even Dahlia got a piece of that!"

On the opposite side, Trey Mack is livid, shouting across the floor and pointing at Rosa, while Valkyrie Knox takes two

sharp steps forward before Clovis Black puts an arm across her path, not stopping her from fighting, but stopping her from getting there too early and setting the whole outside off at once.

Trey Mack: "Hey! Hey! Watch your damn hands!"

Rosa points right back.

Rosa Delgado: "Bring yours over here then!"

That nearly does it.

Juno Sage starts laughing.

Shannon Ray claps sarcastically again.

Nancy Rhodes turns on them both.

Athena steps in closer.

Kaida Shizuka finally moves in too, not fast, not emotional, but with that same silent readiness that says she'll escalate if anyone gives her the excuse.

John Phillips: "The ringside tension is boiling over!"

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, but remember the goal! Get 'em back in the ring! That's the whole point of this stipulation!"

Inside, Amy scrambles on all fours after being shoved back under the ropes, shocked and furious and now visibly rattled that the floor just turned against her so quickly. Marie is already there, stalking in, not letting the challenger recover from the outside trip for even a second.

John Phillips: "And Marie was waiting for her!"

Marie grabs Amy by the back of the head and pulls her up into a forearm that snaps her upright, then another that sends her backward into the ropes she just came from. Amy tries to cover up, tries to protest, tries to talk, but Marie isn't hearing it now.

Marie Van Claudio: "Get up!"

She whips Amy across the ring.

Amy rebounds.

Marie catches her with a picture-perfect dropkick to the chest that sends her sprawling.

John Phillips: "Beautiful dropkick by Marie!"

Amy rolls onto her side, clutching at her ribs, and for the first time tonight she looks like she fully understands how dangerous the ring and the floor both are. There is nowhere to run. Not really. Not when one side wants to throw you back in and the other wants to drag you there.

Outside, the lumberjills are still jawing.

Trey has to be held in place by his own better judgment.

Rosa and Selena stay forward.

Athena and Nancy keep their eyes moving between Amy and the women opposite them.

Valkyrie looks like she is waiting for one more chance to justify violence.

Mark Bravo: "That's the first full demonstration right there. Amy goes out on the wrong side, and the Lumberjills do exactly what they're supposed to do: hurt you and hurl you back in."

John Phillips: "And now Amy Harrison knows firsthand that the outside may be even worse than the ring."

Marie reaches down again, pulling Amy back toward her feet as the crowd roars, sensing the champion's momentum growing and the outside powder keg inching one step closer to full detonation.

Marie Van Claudio keeps Amy Harrison from ever fully resetting after that trip to the floor. The second Amy gets one boot under her, Marie is there again, one hand hooked behind the head, the other controlling the wrist, dragging the challenger upright and forcing her to stay in the fight on Marie's terms.

John Phillips: "Marie is not giving Amy Harrison even a second to breathe."

Mark Bravo: "Nope. And that's smart, because after what just happened outside, Amy's head ain't all in one place right now."

Amy tries to peel Marie's hands off and throws a weak back elbow over her shoulder. Marie sees it coming, slips just outside the line, and answers with a sharp knee to the midsection that folds Amy forward. The crowd roars as Marie quickly snaps on a front facelock and drags Amy into a tight spin before planting her with a snap DDT.

John Phillips: "Snap DDT by Marie Van Claudio!"

Amy bounces off the mat and turns over toward the ropes on instinct again, but there is far less confidence in the movement now. Outside, Trey Mack is still shouting, pacing his side of the ring, while Valkyrie Knox remains a coiled threat a few steps behind him. Clovis Black does not say anything, but he's moved closer now, making sure there is no repeat of Amy getting handled too easily if she tumbles their way next time.

Mark Bravo: "The New Empire side is gettin' real jumpy now. They don't like what they just saw happen to Amy on the floor."

On the other side, Rosa Delgado is fired up, clearly wanting more. Selena Vex has the look of someone staying disciplined, but only just. Dahlia Cross still gives away less than either of them, though every time Amy looks her direction there is absolutely no warmth there. Angela Hall, Athena Storm, and Nancy Rhodes all stand forward too, no longer spectators so much as waiting pieces on the board.

John Phillips: "And Marie's side of the floor looks more energized than ever. That one outside exchange may have galvanized them."

Inside the ring, Marie floats over into a cover.

Referee: "One! Two—"

Amy kicks out.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison still alive in this thing."

Marie doesn't look frustrated by the kickout. She looks focused. She grabs Amy by the arm again and drags her toward the corner, clearly thinking about making the ring smaller, uglier, and harder to escape. She drives Amy back-first into the buckles, then shoulders into the ribs once, twice, three times in rhythm.

Mark Bravo: "Marie Van Claudio is wrestlin' like a woman who knows exactly what's at stake tonight."

Amy slumps forward in the corner, and Marie backs away half a step, then rushes in with a running forearm smash that rocks the challenger's head to the side. Amy stumbles out of the corner into Marie's arms, and Marie immediately hooks for a German suplex.

John Phillips: "She's got her hooked!"

The crowd rises, sensing it, but Amy fights like hell. She throws her weight sideways, hooks her boot around Marie's leg, and flails backward with an elbow that finally catches Marie flush on the side of the face. That breaks the grip just

enough.

Mark Bravo: "Amy was not about to take that ride!"

Amy spins free and immediately grabs Marie by the hair again out of sheer desperation. The referee is on her for it, but she ignores him and yanks Marie toward the ropes. Then Amy drops her shoulder and throws her whole body into the motion, trying to dump Marie through the ropes and out to the floor the same way she was thrown just moments ago.

John Phillips: "Now Amy's trying to return the favor!"

Marie hits the ropes hard and tumbles awkwardly through the middle and top strands, but not cleanly. She lands on the apron instead of the floor, one leg still tangled for a second, one hand clinging to the top rope to save herself.

Mark Bravo: "Not out! Not all the way!"

And that changes the outside dynamic instantly again.

Because now both sides are moving.

Rosa Delgado rushes toward Marie's side of the apron to protect her lane back in.

Valkyrie Knox closes from the opposite angle like a shark smelling blood.

Angela Hall and Athena Storm move too, stepping between Marie and the heel side's nearest path. Trey Mack starts shouting for Amy to knock her off the apron while Shannon Ray barks something back across the ring that makes Nancy Rhodes step forward in her direction.

John Phillips: "Outside the ring is turning into a traffic jam of bad intentions!"

Mark Bravo: "And Marie's stuck on the apron right in the middle of it!"

Inside, Amy sees the danger and charges immediately, looking to knock Marie off before the champion can recover. Marie gets one shoulder through the ropes just in time to catch Amy coming and drives a forearm right into the side of her face. Amy stumbles but comes right back. Marie fires another. Amy answers with one of her own through the ropes.

The crowd is roaring now as the whole thing threatens to spill for real.

John Phillips: "This is so dangerous!"

Marie tries to climb back in, but Amy blasts her with one more forearm and finally knocks her off balance. Marie falls from the apron to the floor—this time for real—on the side nearest Rosa, Selena, Dahlia, Angela, Athena, and Nancy.

John Phillips: "Marie is down to the floor!"

Mark Bravo: "And here we go!"

The babyface-leaning side closes around her instantly, but their job is not to let her stay out there. Rosa reaches her first, grabbing her under the arm and trying to pull her back upright. Angela Hall steps in to help guide her toward the apron. Athena Storm points toward the ring and shouts for Marie to move. Nancy Rhodes turns her attention outward instead, glaring down Shannon Ray and Juno Sage, who have both stepped closer with entirely different ideas.

John Phillips: "And this is the point of the Lumberjills—they're trying to get Marie right back in the ring!"

But it is not clean.

Because Shannon Ray shoves closer.

Juno Sage gets in Rosa's face.

Kaida Shizuka moves just enough to make her presence felt without technically touching anyone yet.

And suddenly the ringside tension that's been simmering is right on the verge of turning physical.

Mark Bravo: "This is getting messy! Everybody's trying to do the job, but everybody's also got opinions about how it should happen!"

Selena Vex steps in between Rosa and Juno with both palms out, trying to keep the heel side from crowding too close while Marie is still vulnerable. Dahlia Cross, who had been holding back more than the others, finally moves in too—not to brawl, but to make sure Amy's side does not get an easy cheap shot while Marie is being pushed back toward the apron.

John Phillips: "Look at Dahlia Cross now stepping in. She wants none of Amy's side getting a free crack here."

Inside the ring, Amy Harrison paces at the ropes with a wicked grin on her face, loving every second of the chaos she sees below her. She points toward the floor and shouts.

Amy Harrison: "Take your time! I've got all night!"

Mark Bravo: "That's Amy. She doesn't even care if the outside burns down as long as she thinks it helps her."

But Marie is already being lifted and pushed toward the apron by the Lumberjills on her side. Rosa and Angela get her to the edge first, Athena helping from behind. Marie plants both hands on the apron and starts to slide back under—only for Amy to hit the ropes and come charging across the ring again, ready to meet her at the point of re-entry.

John Phillips: "And Amy's looking to make her pay the moment she comes back in!"

The floor is one breath away from exploding.

The ring is one breath away from another collision.

And the main event keeps getting more volatile with every passing second.

Marie Van Claudio slides under the bottom rope with urgency, one shoulder first, then the rest of her body dragging through as Amy Harrison comes charging across the ring like a woman trying to stomp the life out of the return before it can happen.

John Phillips: "Here comes Amy!"

Amy swings a vicious boot downward the second Marie gets halfway in, but Marie rolls through just enough to make it glance off her shoulder instead of her head. The crowd gasps at how close that was. Marie scrambles toward hands and knees while Amy whips around and stomps at her again.

Mark Bravo: "That was inches from disaster!"

Marie catches the second stomp.

The crowd roars.

She traps Amy's ankle from one knee, looks up with a fierce glare, and twists hard enough to force Amy to hop, then fall backward to the mat in frustration.

John Phillips: "Beautiful counter by Marie Van Claudio!"

Amy lands on her backside and immediately starts shouting again, furious that her timing was right and her outcome was wrong. Marie pushes up to her feet, still breathing hard from the spill to the floor and the rush back in, but the focus is there. Amy scrambles up too and now both women fire toward each other at once.

Forearm by Marie.

Forearm by Amy.

Marie again.

Amy with a slap.

Marie with a right hand.

Mark Bravo: "They are not taking a breath! Not one!"

Outside the ring, the ringside friction still hasn't cooled. Rosa Delgado is jawing at Juno Sage. Selena Vex has moved shoulder-to-shoulder with Rosa now, both of them keeping an eye on the ring and the women opposite them. Angela Hall and Athena Storm stay close too, their attention split between protecting Marie's side and making sure Shannon Ray or Kaida Shizuka don't get too cute if the action spills back out.

On Amy's side, Valkyrie Knox has not retreated far at all. Trey Mack still paces and points and shouts instructions nobody inside the ring asked for. Clovis Black remains the silent warning sign in the middle of it all, his eyes sweeping the floor and the apron with the calm of a man fully prepared to step in if the chance comes.

John Phillips: "The Lumberjills haven't settled down at all."

Mark Bravo: "Nope. That outside situation is one shove away from breaking apart."

Inside, Amy rakes at Marie's face to create space and then tries to throw her through the ropes again with a hard Irish whip. Marie reverses it this time. Amy runs to the ropes, rebounds, and ducks a clothesline. Marie turns. Amy catches her with a spinning heel kick right to the side of the jaw.

John Phillips: "Spinning heel kick by Amy Harrison!"

Marie staggers sideways and nearly drops, but doesn't. Amy sees the opening and lunges in, hooking for a facebuster. Marie fights the grip. Amy keeps wrenching, trying to force it through. Marie blocks one foot, twists her hips, and shoves Amy off.

Amy rebounds into the ropes.

Marie charges.

Both women collide shoulder-first near the strands and the impact sends them both stumbling awkwardly toward opposite sides of the ring.

Mark Bravo: "Nobody's gettin' clean control here!"

Marie hits her side of the ropes and holds them to stay upright. Amy hits hers and does the same. For one quick second both women are draped there, catching just enough balance to launch again.

And that second is enough for the camera to catch the ringside tension climbing another notch.

Juno Sage bumps shoulders with Rosa Delgado on purpose.

Rosa immediately turns.

Selena steps in.

Nancy Rhodes steps in too.

Shannon Ray closes in from the heel side while Angela Hall and Athena Storm move to block her lane.

John Phillips: "They're crowding again out there!"

The referee sees it and points out through the ropes while still trying to keep the match in front of him.

Referee: "Back up! All of you! Back up!"

But inside the ring there is no pause. Amy and Marie explode off the ropes at the same time and collide mid-ring with dueling clotheslines that stagger both women without dropping either one.

Mark Bravo: "Ohhh! Both women still standing!"

The crowd roars. Amy swings wildly. Marie ducks. Marie comes up behind with a waistlock. Amy throws a back elbow. Marie absorbs it, keeps the grip, and this time muscles through with the German suplex she wanted earlier. Amy flips hard and lands high on the shoulders and upper back.

John Phillips: "German suplex by Marie Van Claudio!"

Amy rolls toward the ropes again on instinct, and now the crowd starts rising because they know what that means. She is near the apron. Near the floor. Near the women who have spent the whole match waiting for a reason.

Mark Bravo: "Not that side again..."

Marie gets to her feet and charges, but Amy has just enough awareness left to yank the top rope down as Marie closes in. Marie's momentum carries her through, and suddenly the champion tumbles out to the floor again—this time on the opposite side.

John Phillips: "Marie's out again!"

Mark Bravo: "And this is the dangerous side!"

Because this time it is Valkyrie Knox, Trey Mack, Clovis Black, Kaida Shizuka, Juno Sage, and Shannon Ray closest to the landing zone.

They all move at once.

Not to let Marie breathe.

To do the Lumberjill job the cruel way.

Trey reaches her first, grabbing her by the arm and shoulder to haul her upright. Shannon Ray shoves from the side. Juno Sage cracks her with a forearm between the shoulders just before Marie can fully regain herself. Kaida steps in with a cold, sharp kick to the thigh that buckles her for a second.

John Phillips: "They're roughing her up on the way back in!"

Mark Bravo: "That's the ugly version of this stipulation right there! They're still putting her back in, but they're makin' sure she pays for the trip!"

Then Valkyrie Knox arrives.

She doesn't waste a word.

She simply grabs Marie by the back of the head, looks her dead in the eye for half a second, and shoves her violently under the bottom rope and back into the ring.

John Phillips: "And Valkyrie Knox just sent Marie right back to Amy Harrison!"

On the opposite side, Rosa Delgado and Athena Storm are shouting across the ring now, furious that Marie landed on the heel side of the floor. Selena Vex steps up beside them, Dahlia Cross just behind. Angela Hall points toward Trey and yells for him to keep his hands off. Clovis Black stares across at all of them like he would be perfectly fine if this turned into something much uglier.

Mark Bravo: "This is turning into factions by proximity now. Everybody out there is picking a line whether they meant to or not."

Inside the ring, Amy Harrison is already waiting, licking her lips with satisfaction as Marie crawls back in, hurting,

breathing hard, and once again trying to get stable before the challenger can capitalize. Amy doesn't let her.

She sprints forward and catches Marie with a sliding knee to the ribs the second she gets fully under the ropes.

John Phillips: "Amy right on top of her!"

Marie winces and rolls, but Amy stays on her with stomps to the side and back, then drags her toward center ring by the wrist, clearly wanting to keep the fight away from the ropes for once—not because she's scared, but because she likes the taste of control now that the floor finally worked in her favor.

Mark Bravo: "Now Amy's got something. Now she's got momentum, and she knows it."

The crowd boos hard as Amy spreads her arms for a second and starts mouthing off again, louder than ever, her confidence refueled by the ugly scene outside and the fact that Marie had to come back in through a gauntlet.

Amy Harrison: "That's your division?"

Amy Harrison: "That's your queen?"

She yanks Marie up again by the hair and grins with all the cruelty in the world.

Amy Harrison: "Get up. I'm not done with you."

And outside the ring, nobody is settled. Nobody is calm. The Lumberjills are no longer just surrounding the match.

They are circling it like the next collapse might pull them all in.

Amy Harrison jerks Marie Van Claudio upright by the hair and keeps talking while she does it, because of course she does. The challenger has momentum now, the outside of the ring is rattled, and that means the most dangerous version of Amy Harrison is back in full bloom.

Amy Harrison: "Look at you."

Amy Harrison: "All that pride... all that hype... and they still had to shove you back in here for me."

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison is loving this right now."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because Amy don't just want control. She wants the humiliation that comes with it."

She drags Marie toward the ropes nearest the hard camera and leans her across the middle strand, grinding a forearm under the chin and into the throat while the referee gets in her face immediately.

Referee: "Back her up! Back her up now!"

Amy holds it until four, then breaks with exaggerated innocence, throwing both hands up and backing away with a theatrical little smile that makes the crowd boo even louder.

Mark Bravo: "That act has never fooled anybody, but she keeps doin' it."

Marie coughs and tries to push off the ropes, but Amy rushes right back in with a knee to the stomach, then another to the ribs. She hooks the head and snaps Marie over with a fast suplex, floating into a cover with one arm draped smugly across the chest.

Referee: "One! Two—"

Marie gets the shoulder up.

John Phillips: "Still not enough."

Amy sits up with visible annoyance and slaps the mat once, then once more for emphasis. Outside the ring, Trey Mack claps and shouts encouragement while Valkyrie Knox remains close to the apron, eyes fixed on Marie like she'd be

more than happy to see another spill in her direction. Clovis Black stands just behind them, unreadable as ever, but angled in such a way that it is obvious he is ready if this gets any looser.

On the other side, Rosa Delgado is furious, pacing a short line with Selena Vex talking low to her while keeping one eye on the ring. Dahlia Cross hasn't moved much, but the stare on her face has sharpened every time Amy gets another cheap advantage. Angela Hall and Athena Storm are openly vocal now, shouting for Marie to fight up, while Nancy Rhodes barks right back at Juno Sage and Shannon Ray whenever either of them gets too smug.

John Phillips: "Nobody outside is even pretending to be calm anymore."

Mark Bravo: "Nope. This has become a pressure cooker around the whole ring."

Inside, Amy grabs Marie's wrist and twists the arm, then drives a sharp kick into the side of the knee just to take a little more base away from her. Marie drops to one knee. Amy grins and runs her mouth again.

Amy Harrison: "You don't lead this division anymore."

Amy Harrison: "You survive in it if I let you."

She tries to yank Marie up into position for a facebuster, but Marie hangs on and blocks it. Amy pulls harder. Marie plants. Amy stomps the boot. Marie absorbs it and finally fires back with a short right hand to the body, then another. The crowd starts to rise as Marie builds from her knees instead of trying to stand all at once.

John Phillips: "Here comes Marie!"

Body shot.

Another.

Then a forearm upstairs that snaps Amy's head back and breaks the hold completely. Marie gets to her feet now and drives Amy backward with successive forearms, each one getting louder reactions from the crowd as the challenger starts to lose ground.

Mark Bravo: "That's what Marie needed. Stop trying to out-slick Amy and just hit through her."

Marie whips Amy to the ropes. Amy rebounds. Marie catches her with a back body drop that sends her flying high and hard across the canvas. Amy lands badly and rolls instinctively toward the apron again.

John Phillips: "What elevation!"

The crowd roars, and outside the ring the motion starts all over again. Trey and Valkyrie both shift toward Amy's side. Rosa and Athena inch closer from the opposite angle. Shannon Ray and Nancy Rhodes are still jawing, and now Kaida Shizuka has moved a step nearer as if to be ready when the lane opens.

Inside the ring, Marie sees Amy crawling and doesn't hesitate. She charges, looking to knock her out to the floor before the challenger can find her feet.

Mark Bravo: "Marie's thinking about the outside again!"

Amy senses it at the last second and drops low, pulling the middle rope down. Marie checks her own momentum this time and doesn't go sailing through, but the abrupt stop sends her forward enough that she ends up half-draped over the top strand, vulnerable for a heartbeat.

Amy pounces on that heartbeat.

She stands and shoves upward under Marie's legs and hips, trying to dump her out one more time.

John Phillips: "Again to the floor—no!"

Marie clings to the ropes and kicks free. Both women end up tangled there awkwardly for a moment, one trying to

throw, the other trying to stay in, and the crowd is roaring because everyone knows one clean spill now could ignite the whole perimeter.

Outside, the lumberjills start crowding the apron again.

Rosa and Selena move first from Marie's side.

Trey and Valkyrie answer from Amy's.

Angela Hall and Athena Storm come in behind Rosa.

Juno Sage and Shannon Ray drift in from the opposite lane with smiles that say they're ready for nonsense.

John Phillips: "This is becoming impossible to control!"

Mark Bravo: "And still the main goal is supposed to be simple: if they come out, get 'em back in. But everybody's got their own idea of how hard that trip should be."

Marie finally breaks the tie-up at the ropes with a sharp back elbow to Amy's temple. Amy stumbles. Marie turns and grabs her by the head, then slings her through the ropes instead. Amy hits the apron, catches herself, and tumbles down to the floor on the side where Valkyrie, Trey, Clovis, Juno, Kaida, and Shannon are all closest.

John Phillips: "Amy's out again!"

This time her side gets to her first.

Trey catches her by the shoulders to steady her. Valkyrie steps in immediately with a hand to the back, not gentle, but protective in her own brutal way, helping keep Amy upright while also pushing her back toward the ring. Juno and Shannon crowd close enough to bark at the opposite side, daring them to try anything from across the floor. Kaida stays near the lane, expression unreadable, making sure no one cuts through to interfere.

Mark Bravo: "Amy landed on the right side this time!"

But "right side" in a Lumberjill match still doesn't mean comfort. Clovis Black reaches in and, with no ceremony at all, simply grabs Amy by the arm and shoves her under the bottom rope with such force that she nearly slides all the way to center ring.

John Phillips: "Even her own side isn't exactly treating her with kid gloves!"

Mark Bravo: "No, because the job is still the job. Get her back in there."

Marie is already waiting for her again, and the crowd explodes as the champion rushes in with a running kick to the side just as Amy gets to hands and knees. Amy cries out and rolls, clutching her ribs, while Marie stands over her breathing hard but looking more energized than she has since the opening minute.

John Phillips: "Marie Van Claudio staying one step ahead!"

Outside the ring, the opposing sides are closer than ever now, separated more by the apron than by actual distance. Rosa and Shannon are still chirping. Nancy and Juno are nearly shoulder to shoulder. Athena Storm and Kaida Shizuka keep stealing glances at each other that look more and more like invitations to trouble.

Mark Bravo: "This is gonna blow eventually. It has to. There is too much bad blood and not enough space."

Inside, Marie pulls Amy up once more, and the fight keeps moving with the floor circling closer and closer like hungry wolves waiting for one more slip.

Marie Van Claudio keeps hold of Amy Harrison and drags her back to center ring, refusing to let the challenger settle in near the ropes where the match can turn into a coin flip of bodies and allegiances again. Amy tries to twist free, but Marie keeps the wrist trapped and jerks her forward into a sharp knee lift to the stomach.

John Phillips: "Marie is doing the smart thing here. Pulling Amy away from the edges, away from the chaos, and making this about the fight again."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, because every time this gets close to the floor, it feels like the whole match wants to explode."

Marie whips Amy across the ring. Amy hits the ropes and rebounds. Marie swings for a clothesline. Amy ducks under it and keeps running, then springs off the opposite side and comes back with a flying forearm that catches Marie flush in the jaw.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison answers back!"

Marie staggers but doesn't go down. Amy snarls and comes right back in with another forearm, then another, driving Marie backward one hard step at a time. The challenger's mouth is still running too, because the offense and the venom always seem to come together with her.

Amy Harrison: "You really thought this was yours?"

Amy Harrison: "You really thought they'd choose you over me?"

She shoves Marie hard toward the ropes and rushes in behind her, looking for another chance to turn the ring boundary into a weapon. But Marie sees it coming and drops her weight low, pulling the top rope down at the last moment.

Amy doesn't spill through.

She catches herself on the apron.

Again.

Mark Bravo: "Not all the way out, but close enough to start a war!"

And once more, that outside ring of bodies comes alive.

Trey Mack steps forward immediately, one hand out, shouting for Amy to hang on. Valkyrie Knox closes from the same side, posture sharpening, ready to make the return as painful as possible if anybody touches her. On the opposite lane, Rosa Delgado and Selena Vex both rush closer anyway, not to help Amy, obviously, but because no one trusts what that side of the floor might do unchallenged.

John Phillips: "Look at everybody converging again!"

Athena Storm and Angela Hall move in behind Rosa and Selena. Shannon Ray and Juno Sage slide nearer from the heel side. Kaida Shizuka angles herself in to guard space. Nancy Rhodes points across the ring and shouts something that gets an immediate answer from Shannon.

Mark Bravo: "The outside is getting uglier by the second!"

Inside, Marie grabs for Amy's head, trying to knock her off the apron before the heel side can stabilize her. Amy blocks the hand, slaps Marie across the face again, and springboards back in with a shoulder to the midsection that drives the champion backward two steps.

John Phillips: "Amy springing off the apron and right back into Marie!"

Amy capitalizes instantly, grabbing a front facelock and taking Marie over with a quick swinging neckbreaker. The crowd boos, but Amy is back on top again and she knows it. She rolls to her knees, points to her own head, and shouts down at Marie.

Amy Harrison: "Smarter than you."

Mark Bravo: "She really cannot help herself."

Amy pulls Marie up by the arm and snaps her into the corner, then drives a running back elbow into her chest. Marie stumbles out. Amy catches her with a second rope-assisted jawbreaker that drops the champion to one knee.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison stringing it together now!"

Outside, the lumberjills are no longer even pretending not to have sides. Rosa Delgado is shouting for Marie to get up. Trey Mack is yelling over her. Selena Vex turns and gets in Trey's face just long enough for Clovis Black to step between them without a word, his mere presence enough to force a half-second pause. Across from that, Angela Hall has to put a hand out toward Nancy Rhodes as Nancy takes a heated step toward Shannon Ray.

Mark Bravo: "It's all getting tighter out there. Clovis just stepped in. Selena's jawing with Trey. Nancy wants a piece of Shannon. This whole thing is one spark from going off."

Amy sees the distraction outside and uses it. She hooks Marie around the waist and tries to sling her toward the ropes again, looking for another trip to the floor where the heel side can get first contact. Marie plants and blocks it. Amy tries again. Marie still won't go. Amy stomps the foot, yanks the hair, and finally gets enough of a turn to send Marie stumbling side-first into the ropes nearest Juno, Shannon, Kaida, Valkyrie, Trey, and Clovis.

Marie hits hard and catches herself on the top strand.

Amy charges.

Marie ducks.

Amy slams chest-first into the ropes and spills halfway through them.

John Phillips: "Amy got caught again!"

For a second it looks like she might fall all the way out, and the heel side reaches for her. Trey grabs at one arm. Valkyrie reaches for the other. But Marie is already there from behind, wrapping both arms around Amy's waist and trying to force the dump before anyone can fully steady her.

Mark Bravo: "This is bad! This is real bad!"

On the opposite side of the floor, Rosa and Athena start moving that direction too, trying to get around the ring before anything can happen unchecked. Selena follows. Dahlia Cross doesn't sprint, but she moves with purpose, clearly unwilling to let Amy's people control the landing if it comes.

Inside the ropes, Amy clings.

Outside, Trey and Valkyrie tug.

Inside, Marie pulls backward.

The crowd is absolutely losing it.

John Phillips: "This is the whole match in one image right here!"

Mark Bravo: "Everybody pulling from different directions and nobody trustin' anybody!"

The referee is yelling now, trying to make sense of the hands on the outside and the struggle on the inside, but there is too much going on at once. Amy finally breaks the stalemate the only way she can—by snapping a mule kick backward between Marie's legs that catches the champion in the thigh and hip enough to break the grip.

Marie stumbles.

Trey and Valkyrie yank Amy the rest of the way back down to the floor.

And now Amy is fully out again—on her own side.

John Phillips: "Amy's on the floor!"

Trey catches her upright. Valkyrie shoves her toward the apron. Juno and Shannon close around them immediately, creating a moving wall. Kaida steps in front of the nearest lane like a guard at a checkpoint.

Mark Bravo: "Heel side's got her!"

But they don't get to settle it clean.

Because Rosa, Selena, and Athena all arrive at once from the other side.

Not to attack Amy outright.

Not yet.

But to make damn sure she doesn't get a luxury return.

John Phillips: "And now everybody's here!"

Rosa shouts at Trey. Shannon shouts at Rosa. Selena gets between Juno and Athena. Nancy Rhodes reaches the pack a second later and immediately gets face-to-face with Shannon Ray. Angela Hall tries to keep a little order while Clovis Black looms over the whole scrum like he might crush it flat if he decides to move. Dahlia Cross and Valkyrie Knox lock eyes for a brief second through the bodies, neither blinking, neither backing away.

Mark Bravo: "This is turning into a damn street corner fight!"

In the middle of all of it, Amy uses the confusion and shoves herself under the bottom rope before anyone on either side can fully decide how violent her return should be. She slides back in and rolls toward center ring on instinct.

John Phillips: "Amy got back in on her own that time!"

Marie is waiting again, but only barely now. She's hurt. Amy's hurt. The outside is boiling. The pace is getting more desperate. Marie reaches for Amy's head. Amy grabs at the wrist. They both rise in a tangle and start throwing again before either can fully stand.

Mark Bravo: "This thing is becoming survival now."

Outside the ring, the lumberjills still have not separated much. They're not fighting yet. But they are no longer just surrounding the match. They are crowding it, breathing on it, pressing against it, waiting for the next stumble to tell them exactly who they are tonight.

Amy Harrison and Marie Van Claudio are back on their feet only in the loosest possible sense.

Not standing tall.

Not reset.

Just upright enough to keep hurting each other.

Marie fires first with a forearm.

Amy answers with one of her own.

Marie snaps Amy's head sideways with another shot.

Amy claws at the wrist and drives a knee toward the stomach.

Neither woman is smooth anymore.

Everything has become desperate.

John Phillips: "They are dragging each other deeper into this now."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah, this ain't about who's prettier with it anymore. This is grit and hate and whoever's got enough left to stand one second longer."

Outside the ring, the Lumberjills and jacks are packed tighter than ever now. The verbal shots aren't even isolated anymore. They're layered. Rosa Delgado is still jawing at Trey Mack. Nancy Rhodes is in Shannon Ray's face. Selena Vex is trying to keep one lane clear while also barking right back at Juno Sage. Athena Storm and Angela Hall are both forward, both ready, while Kaida Shizuka and Valkyrie Knox stand like cold warning signs on the opposite side.

John Phillips: "This ringside area is a powder keg."

Mark Bravo: "No question. And all it's gonna take is one bad collision or one bad decision."

Inside, Amy suddenly catches Marie with a sharp rake across the eyes.

The crowd erupts in boos.

Mark Bravo: "There it is. Amy can't help herself."

Marie stumbles backward and Amy capitalizes immediately, hooking the head and throwing her through the ropes toward the side where Shannon Ray, Juno Sage, Kaida Shizuka, Valkyrie Knox, Trey Mack, and Clovis Black are closest.

Marie lands awkwardly against the apron and spills down to the floor on her knees.

John Phillips: "Marie is out again!"

The heel side swarms her.

Shannon Ray steps in first with a shove to the shoulder.

Juno Sage follows with a cheap forearm to the upper back.

Trey starts shouting for them to throw her back in.

Valkyrie steps forward with cold purpose.

But before they can finish the job, Rosa Delgado comes flying around the ring.

John Phillips: "Here comes Rosa!"

Rosa blasts Juno from the side and drives her backward off Marie. The crowd explodes. Selena Vex is right behind her, pulling Shannon away by the arm and shoving her back. Athena Storm and Angela Hall rush over too, trying to get Marie clear enough to be put back into the ring without Amy's whole side mauling her on the way.

Mark Bravo: "And now the other side's crashing in! They're trying to protect the lane back to the ring!"

Kaida Shizuka steps in to cut Rosa off.

Nancy Rhodes barrels over and gets between Athena and Shannon.

Clovis Black looms in, making the whole lane feel even tighter.

Dahlia Cross finally arrives and grabs Marie under the arm with Selena, trying to help haul her upright and back toward the apron.

John Phillips: "This is complete chaos at ringside!"

Inside the ring, Amy Harrison is screaming through the ropes.

Amy Harrison: "Get her in! Get her in! I want her back in here!"

But nobody out there is listening to Amy anymore.

They're listening to the moment.

To the adrenaline.

To old grudges and fresh opportunities.

And then it happens.

Juno Sage, furious after getting rocked by Rosa, shoves free of Selena and climbs up onto the apron.

John Phillips: "Wait a minute—Juno's on the apron!"

Marie is halfway under the bottom rope now, with Dahlia and Selena trying to guide her back in. Juno sees her opening and, instead of staying on the floor where she belongs, steps through the ropes and into the ring.

Mark Bravo: "No! No, no, no! Juno Sage is in the ring!"

The crowd erupts.

Juno rushes at Marie the second she gets in, looking to stomp her down before she can fully rise.

Amy Harrison backs up just enough to smile at the sight.

John Phillips: "That's it! Somebody from the outside has entered the ring!"

And once that line is crossed, the whole thing detonates.

Rosa Delgado dives under the bottom rope right after Juno.

Selena Vex follows.

Shannon Ray storms in from the opposite side.

Athena Storm slides in.

Kaida Shizuka climbs through.

Angela Hall rushes in.

Dahlia Cross steps through the ropes with bad intentions written all over her face.

Nancy Rhodes is next.

Valkyrie Knox enters.

Then Trey Mack.

Then Clovis Black.

John Phillips: "EVERYONE'S COMING IN!"

Mark Bravo: "The whole damn ringside area just spilled into the ring!"

The crowd is absolutely losing its mind now.

There is no order.

No pairing.

No clean lines.

Just bodies and fists and shoulders and shoves and screaming.

Rosa tackles Juno.

Selena and Shannon are trading forearms in one corner.

Athena Storm and Kaida Shizuka are throwing bombs in another.

Angela Hall drives into Trey Mack, and Trey bails backward into Clovis Black, who immediately turns and blasts somebody out of his lane.

Dahlia Cross and Valkyrie Knox lock up in a furious, ugly exchange near the ropes, both women refusing to give ground.

Nancy Rhodes gets shoved from one side into another fight entirely and just starts swinging at whoever is nearest.

John Phillips: "This has completely broken down!"

Mark Bravo: "This is the whole stipulation falling apart in real time!"

And in the middle of all of it—

Marie Van Claudio and Amy Harrison find each other again.

As they always do.

Marie is still trying to regain her feet from the trip to the floor and the brawl spilling over her. Amy steps in with a kick to the stomach and grabs for the head. Marie shoves her off. Amy lunges again. Marie catches her with a forearm. Amy answers. The two women begin trading in the middle of a full-scale riot, neither willing to let the chaos around them become an excuse for losing sight of the real war.

John Phillips: "And somehow, in the middle of this madness, Marie and Amy are still trying to tear each other apart!"

The referee is hopeless now, screaming for everybody to get out, waving his arms, trying to restore any kind of control and getting none. Security and additional officials can be seen running down the ramp from the back now, because there is no longer even a pretense that this is contained.

Mark Bravo: "You need help! You need officials, security, producers, everybody! This is not a match right now, this is a riot!"

The ring is a sea of motion.

Valkyrie and Dahlia crash through one set of ropes and spill half out to the apron before fighting back in.

Rosa and Juno roll under the bottom rope and keep throwing on the floor.

Selena drives Shannon into the corner.

Athena and Kaida are still striking in the center-left of the ring.

Clovis throws Trey out of one collision path only to end up face-to-face with Angela Hall.

Nancy Rhodes gets yanked backward by somebody and responds with a blind elbow that catches the wrong person and starts a whole new branch of the fight.

John Phillips: "I can barely even call what I'm seeing anymore!"

Mark Bravo: "Nobody can! It's everybody on everybody!"

And still, amid all of it, Amy Harrison and Marie Van Claudio keep finding each other through the smoke.

Amy tries for a slap.

Marie ducks and shoves her backward into the pack.

Amy gets thrown off balance into Trey Mack.

Trey pushes her forward again.

Marie catches her and hammers her with another forearm.

The whole scene has become what everyone feared it could become from the opening bell onward.

One person crossed the line.

And now there are no lines left.

The riot in the ring is still fully alive when help comes flying down the ramp.

Scott Stevens leads the charge himself.

Producers behind him.

Officials behind them.

Security pouring down in numbers that make it obvious one thing more than anything else:

after what happened in the six-man tag earlier tonight, Scott Stevens came prepared for the possibility that this show might need to be dragged back from the brink by force.

John Phillips: "Here comes Scott Stevens!"

Mark Bravo: "And this time he brought an army with him!"

Stevens is already yelling before he reaches the ring.

Scott Stevens: "STOP IT!"

Scott Stevens: "EVERYBODY OUT! NOW!"

Scott Stevens: "GET THEM APART! MOVE!"

Security hits ringside and starts peeling bodies away in every direction.

Officials climb onto the apron and through the ropes, grabbing arms, shoving shoulders back, trying to untangle the fights that exploded when Juno Sage crossed the line and brought the whole outside war in with her.

Producers are shouting names now.

Telling people to back off.

Telling them to get out.

Threatening fines, suspensions, whatever they think might work in the middle of a scene this far gone.

John Phillips: "They are trying to clear this ring by force!"

One by one, the bodies start peeling away.

Rosa Delgado gets pulled backward out of a tangle with Juno Sage.

Selena Vex is separated from Shannon Ray.

Athena Storm and Kaida Shizuka are dragged apart by two different officials each.

Angela Hall is being pushed toward the ropes.

Nancy Rhodes is yelling over three shoulders as security walks her back.

Dahlia Cross and Valkyrie Knox are finally broken apart by a small cluster of bodies between them.

Mark Bravo: "They're getting people out! They're actually getting people out!"

But in the middle of all of it...

Marie Van Claudio and Amy Harrison keep going.

Of course they do.

Marie catches Amy with a forearm that snaps her head sharply to the side.

Then another.

Amy swings back wildly.

Marie ducks and catches her flush again, a clean, hard shot that gets a roar from the crowd even in the middle of the chaos.

John Phillips: "Marie caught her good!"

Amy stumbles.

And for one split second it looks like Marie might actually fight through the smoke and come out of the wreckage with control.

Then the New Empire closes in.

Trey Mack from one side.

Clovis Black from the other.

Valkyrie Knox right behind them.

Mark Bravo: "No! No, no, no!"

All three hit Marie at once in the chaos.

Trey with a forearm high.

Clovis with the heavy body shot that folds her just enough.

Valkyrie crashing in with a brutal shove and strike combination that takes away what little balance the champion still had left.

John Phillips: "The New Empire just swarmed Marie Van Claudio!"

Scott Stevens sees it happen and starts screaming even louder.

Scott Stevens: "GET THEM OUT OF THERE!"

Scott Stevens: "NOW! NOW!"

Security and officials finally get a stronger grip on the ring, dragging bodies through the ropes and forcing the lumberjills and jacks back out to the floor. The mass of people begins to clear just enough for the scene inside to come back into focus.

And when it does...

Marie Van Claudio is down.

John Phillips: "Oh no..."

Amy Harrison is still upright.

Breathing hard.

Half-stunned.

But upright.

Trey Mack is nearest to her.

And before anyone can stop it...

he grabs Amy and pulls her down, placing her on top of Marie Van Claudio.

Mark Bravo: "No! He just put Amy on top of her!"

John Phillips: "Scott Stevens can't believe what he's seeing!"

He can't.

You can see it on his face.

Shock.

Rage.

Disbelief that after all the effort to clear the ring, after all the bodies peeled away, after all the yelling and grabbing and dragging and trying to restore some scrap of order...

this is the image they are left with.

As the ring clears around them, the lumberjills forced back to ringside cannot believe it either.

Rosa Delgado is screaming from the floor.

Selena Vex is reaching toward the ropes.

Dahlia Cross is frozen for half a heartbeat in sheer disbelief.

Athena Storm and Angela Hall both look horrified.

Nancy Rhodes is shouting at the referee.

Even some of the heel side have the kind of look that says the whole thing just got uglier than even they expected.

John Phillips: "Nobody can believe this!"

Mark Bravo: "No one! Not Stevens, not the lumberjills, not this crowd, nobody!"

But the referee sees the cover.

And in the mess...

in the wreckage...

in the awful split-second after the ring has finally been cleared enough to call anything at all...

he drops.

Referee: "ONE!"

The arena gasps.

Referee: "TWO!"

Scott Stevens is screaming now.

Scott Stevens: "NO! NO! DAMN IT!"

Referee: "THREE!"

DING DING DING!

The bell rings.

And for a moment the whole arena feels like it forgot how to breathe.

The bell has already rung.

The count has already fallen.

The damage has already been done.

And now the reality of it settles over the arena like a storm cloud with nowhere left to drift.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison has done it..."

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison has pinned Marie Van Claudio."

The crowd erupts—not in celebration, but in a wave of stunned, furious noise.

Booing.

Shouting.

Protesting.

Because they saw how it happened.

They saw the chaos.

They saw the New Empire crash into the moment.

They saw Marie Van Claudio go down.

They saw Trey Mack place Amy Harrison on top of her.

And they saw the referee count it anyway.

Mark Bravo: "I can't believe this..."

Mark Bravo: "I cannot believe this."

Amy Harrison rolls off Marie and onto her knees, breathing hard, hair hanging wild, face flushed, eyes wide with a kind of savage triumph that only grows the more the crowd rejects her for it.

For a second she just kneels there.

Not because she's stunned.

Because she wants to savor it.

She wants to feel the room understand exactly what just happened.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison is still the International Champion..."

John Phillips: "And now..."

He can barely get the words out.

John Phillips: "Marie Van Claudio... will become her servant."

The crowd gets louder at that.

Meaner.

More horrified.

Because that is the thing they cannot swallow.

Not the title.

Not the victory.

The consequence.

The humiliation.

The cruelty Amy Harrison fought for all along.

Mark Bravo: "Servant?"

Mark Bravo: "No, let's stop dressin' it up now. Amy Harrison got what she wanted. She wanted ownership. She wanted power. She wanted Marie Van Claudio under her heel, and now—because of this—she's got it."

In the ring, Scott Stevens is livid.

He is halfway in, halfway out, looking from the referee to Amy to Trey to Marie, trying to process how to hold a collapsing night in his hands without dropping the whole thing through the floor. His face is a map of disgust and disbelief.

At ringside, the lumberjills are beside themselves.

Rosa Delgado is shouting.

Selena Vex looks sick.

Dahlia Cross is frozen in fury.

Angela Hall and Athena Storm are both staring into the ring like they're waiting for somebody to undo the impossible.

Nancy Rhodes is still yelling toward the referee.

Even Valkyrie Knoxx, Trey Mack, and Clovis Black look less like a celebration and more like a group standing amid a disaster they were willing to create.

John Phillips: "There is no joy in this."

Mark Bravo: "No. There's only shock."

Amy Harrison rises slowly.

And then she smiles.

That awful, satisfied smile.

The one that says she does not care how filthy the road was as long as it took her somewhere she wanted to go.

She looks down at Marie Van Claudio, still laid out on the canvas, still paying for the chaos that swallowed the match whole.

And Amy's smile widens.

John Phillips: "Marie Van Claudio gave everything she had tonight."

Mark Bravo: "And it still wasn't enough to keep the poison out of this."

Amy brushes her hair back and straightens her posture, trying to make herself look regal again, trying to make the image cleaner than what it actually is. But the crowd won't let her. Their hatred follows every breath she takes.

She turns toward the ropes, toward the floor, toward the New Empire, and spreads her arms as though inviting them to admire the empire she just expanded.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison didn't just keep the International Championship..."

John Phillips: "She won the right to claim Marie Van Claudio."

Mark Bravo: "And that may be the darkest sentence we've had to say all night."

The camera finds Marie again.

Still on her back.

Still breathing.

Still in the ring where she fought for dignity, for leadership, for the division, and for the chance to strip Amy Harrison of one more stolen symbol of power.

Instead, Amy walks away with everything she wanted.

The belt.

The leverage.

The cruelty.

The image.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison has done it."

John Phillips: "She is still International Champion."

Mark Bravo: "And now Marie Van Claudio's life in UTA changes in a way nobody wanted to see."

The crowd keeps booing.

Not because they think it will change anything.

Because it is the only protest they have left.

And standing in the middle of it all...

Amy Harrison looks like she believes she just proved exactly who owns the division now.

Security and officials are still scattered around the ring, Scott Stevens still seething, the lumberjills still in various states of shock and outrage...

But the camera knows exactly where to go.

Back to the center.

Back to the image that now defines the end of Victorious.

Marie Van Claudio is down on the canvas.

And rising around her, like a kingdom built on cruelty, is the New Empire.

Amy Harrison first.

Then Trey Mack.

Then Clovis Black.

Then Valkyrie Knox stepping in to complete the picture.

John Phillips: "And there it is..."

Mark Bravo: "Yeah."

Mark Bravo: "That's the shot."

Amy stands at the front, International Championship raised high, chin lifted, face twisted into that same victorious, poisonous smile. Behind and beside her stand Trey Mack, Clovis Black, and Valkyrie Knoxx, forming a wall around the fallen Marie Van Claudio.

It is not just a celebration.

It is a declaration.

A threat.

A monument to exactly how dark this night became.

John Phillips: "Amy Harrison and the New Empire standing over Marie Van Claudio as we come to a close..."

Mark Bravo: "And whether you like it or not... that is the image this show ends on."

The camera settles into one final, lingering power shot.

Amy in front with the gold.

The New Empire flanking her.

Marie down at their feet.

The crowd still raining hatred from all sides.

And with that haunting image burned into the screen...

Victorious fades to black.

Conclusion

CARD SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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