

Wrestlemania 36 Recap: Top 5 Matches

The Top 5 matches from an unprecedented Wrestlemania 36.

By Ricardo Johnson

The first ever pre-taped, too big for one night, empty arena Wrestlemania has come and gone. The WWE's biggest show of the year had both its memorable and not so memorable moments, while all the wrestlers did their best to put on a great show amid the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. All 16 matches stood out on their own, but a few matches stole the show.

With no crowd cheering behind them, every wrestler faced the task of distracting fans in their homes from the pandemic and engulfing them into a different world. When examining the top five matches from Wrestlemania 36, many factors play into making the list. Did the wrestlers have a good story behind them entering their fight? Did their wrestling styles clash, or did they flow well together? Did the match feel impactful on and off-screen? Were the wrestlers able to tell their story throughout the match fluidly?

Below are the top five matches that did all the above and more.

5. Becky Lynch vs. Shayna Baszler for the Raw Women's Championship

In this championship match, there weren't any props, managers or outside interferences — only one referee and two tough competitors fighting for the top prize in women's wrestling. The champion, "The Man" Becky Lynch, came in as the underdog, facing one of her most vicious opponents in former UFC fighter Shayna Baszler.

With no fans in the arena, you could imagine hearing fans at home chanting Becky's theme music as she arrived in her custom semi-truck before the start of this brutal battle.

This was a stiff fight from the beginning, as both women went toe-to-toe as soon as the bell rang. Baszler showed her usual brute strength, which Lynch came prepared for, as she was ready to match Baszler's blows. At one point, Lynch hit Baszler with a vicious Rock Bottom on the edge of the apron that shook Baszler to her core. Baszler was Lynch's "Clubber Lang," as she wouldn't let up on the champion, physically nor verbally.

Towards the end of the match, Lynch began showing signs she was running out of gas; but when Baszler applied the Kirifuda Clutch, Lynch slipped out and rolled Baszler up out of nowhere for a three count, similar to how she beat Ronda Rousey at Wrestlemania 35 last year.

While their story is far from over, Lynch was able to walk out of this battle still the champion.

4. The Kabuki Warriors vs. Alexa Bliss and Nikki Cross for the Women's Tag Team Titles

As the opening match of Wrestlemania weekend, this match set the pace for the rest of the show. All four women were prepared, displaying plenty of intensity and enthusiasm that oozed through the screen. These two teams had battled throughout late 2019, and this match did a great job concluding their story.

Because they had fought many times prior to this match, both teams knew how to flow with each other, although the referee had trouble keeping all four women under control many times throughout the match. The Kabuki Warriors used the arena's dead silence to their advantage, often yelling and taunting in Japanese to get into Bliss and Cross' heads. The banter between the two teams equally matched the physical aggression and intensity throughout the match, which finished with a Twisted Bliss from Alexa on Kairi Sane to win the match.

Both teams were loud, passionate and gave a great attention-grabbing performances that set the pace for the rest of Wrestlemania 36.

3. Kofi Kingston vs. John Morrison vs. Jimmy Uso in a Triple Threat Ladder Match for the Smackdown Tag Team Titles

This battle can be added to the list of great Wrestlemania ladder matches. The match was originally set to be a triple threat tag team ladder match for the titles, but with The Miz being unable to compete, the match was changed to a triple threat ladder match with only one representative from each tag team.

All three men in the match have been known for their athleticism and high-flying abilities, and they showed that once again Saturday night. By adding ladders to this match, the wrestlers did have a slight advantage over the rest of the card, albeit a slight advantage because not many wrestlers would have been able to do what these three men accomplished.

One could imagine fans around the world chanting "holy s*!*" after Morrison walked across the top rope to hit Kingston with a Spanish Fly that led to a Jimmy Uso frog splash from the top rope. The match concluded when all three men began reaching for the suspended belts and unhooked them together at the same time. To Morrison's luck, however, he was hit in the head with the belts, which caused him to not only fall off the ladder, but with the belts in his arms. As soon as he hit the ground, the referee called for the bell and Morrison was announced the winner. Kingston and Jimmy Uso were left looking in disbelief.

2. Kevin Owens vs. Seth Rollins

These two showed why they're the best wrestlers in WWE today. With two high-caliber stars and one of the longest feuds of 2019 coming to a culmination, all that was missing was a championship belt for the two to fight for, right? Wrong. The animosity and disdain the two had for each other was enough, as they produced one hell of a fight.

It felt like these two were there to fight, not entertain. They could have cared less if fans were there or not. These two had fought before, so their styles just flowed perfectly together; and with their years of combined experience, they knew how to take their time in developing the story throughout the match.

At one point in the match, Rollins hit Owens with the ring bell to end the match, preventing Owens from getting his "Wrestlemania moment," even though Owens got the win. This alone would have been an interesting way to end the match, as the match had been very entertaining up until that point.

Obviously, Owens did not want to end the match that way and called for Rollins to return to the ring and turn the match into a non-disqualification match. This gave these two men more space to work with for the second half of their story. Owens' Wrestlemania moment finally came when he put Rollins through the announce table after jumping off of the top of the Wrestlemania sign. After rolling the Monday Night Messiah back into the ring, Owens nailed Rollins with a Stunner to get the win.

1. AJ Styles vs. The Undertaker in a "Boneyard Match"

This match fit this year's Wrestlemania theme perfectly: believe the impossible, because anything can happen. In what was one of The Undertaker's best performances in years and the most entertaining, cinematic match to date, this match stole the show. In Saturday night's main event, The Undertaker returned to end his feud with AJ Styles, defeating him by burying him alive.

The build up to this match began when Styles called out The Undertaker for performing past his prime at such an old age. Styles then challenged The Undertaker to an Undertaker-style match, a Boneyard match, which was basically a Buried Alive match in a cemetery. Unlike many of the other matches on the card, this was filmed in an untraditional fashion, as it felt like a wrestling movie.

There was a story to be told, and both competitors executed it above all expectations. This match did the best job of distracting fans and taking them through a journey away from reality. It had an old American backyard brawl vibe, which saw Styles regretting having asked for it. At one point, Styles began to apologize and beg The Undertaker not to bury him, in which the Undertaker simply replied, "Go out like a man."

The American Bad Ass gave Styles his props for giving him a hell of a fight, right before giving Styles a "This is Sparta!" boot to the chest. Styles fell into the grave, and after filling the grave with dirt and revealing Styles' tombstone immediately above the grave, The Undertaker hopped on his bike, raised his arm to exploding fireworks behind him and drove away the same way he came in, an All-American bad ass.