

WRESTLING TRUMPED

Hair-raising event spares The Donald, thrills 80,000

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DETROIT — It's not every day that you see a little person dressed up as a leprechaun get body slammed from the top of a step-ladder.

That's the unpredictable beauty of WrestleMania, which played out last night before more than 80,000 screaming fans at Ford Field — an all-time attendance record for any event at the venue.

There was a little something for everyone, from Aretha Franklin singing "America the Beautiful" to indoor fireworks to a competitor walking around in little more than a red cape and a yellow Speedo.

And, of course, this year World Wrestling Entertainment's WrestleMania 23 had Donald Trump.

He didn't lose his hair in the heralded "Battle of the Billionaires" — a wager between Trump and WWE chairman Vince McMahon — but he did get in on some of the action, tackling McMahon outside the ring during the match.

As called for in the bet between the two men, the loser, McMahon, later had his head shaved by Trump when the wrestler he chose to represent him was defeated by The Donald's wrestler.

Throughout the night, titans of muscle and sweat battled in — and sometimes out — of the ring in the culmination of a year of dramatic story lines for the WWE.

A sea of fans surrounded them, rippling across the floor as they stood, cheered, and even jumped in time with particularly good body slams.

MULTIMEDIA

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WWE chairman Vince McMahon, center, reacts with disgust after having his head shaved by Donald Trump, left with wrestler Bobby Lashley, as part of their 'Battle of the Billionaires' at WrestleMania 23. (THE BLADE/ERIC SUMBERG)

Among them was little Mike Soldatek, Jr., a stark contrast to the hulking men taking center stage.

The 8-year-old from North Toledo was outfitted in camouflage wristbands and a headband for his favorite wrestler, John Cena.

"He has sweet belts," the smiling boy said as he carried a glittering replica championship belt over his shoulder.

Nearby, Lydia Griffin, 20, of Cleveland, admitted to having the same allegiance, but for different reasons.

"He's cute, I'll admit it," she said.

She was there with her husband, Josh. He has been a fan for 12 years.

"We watch it every week," she said.

Many call this event the Super Bowl of wrestling, and David Cohen, a teacher who made the trip from New York City, couldn't agree more.

This was his fifth time attending WrestleMania.

“You can’t explain the magic and the power WrestleMania brings year after year,” the 29-year-old said. “It’s the type of event that you’re going to talk about all year.”

Sometimes longer. What fan can forget the last time WrestleMania came to the Detroit area, in 1987? That’s when Hulk Hogan famously body slammed Andre the Giant in the Pontiac Silverdome in front of more than 90,000 spectators.

Brian Knake, 54, was there.

“It was pretty good,” said the truck driver from Clarkston, Mich.

Twenty years later, Mr. Knake was back last night, practically the spitting image of Hogan himself.

He wore a red Hulkamania T-shirt and the legendary wrestler’s signature hair and Fu Manchu.

The similarity has not gone unnoticed by others, but he just shrugged it off as he walked back to his seat to catch more of the action.

“I was born with it,” he said.

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