

It Doesn't Have To Be This Way

An Introduction to Wrestling, AEW, and Grand Slam 2024



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Author's Note

Although I have been following All Elite Wrestling since before its official inception, I have admittedly fallen out of watching the weekly product for the better part of 2 years now. On the other hand, I have still watched a majority of the pay-per-views in that time and kept a close eye on storylines, booking, and general discourse around the promotion. I feel the need to begin this document with such clarification to warn the reader that I am not a total AEW sicko, while also providing assurance that I am informed and comfortable in introducing those with absolutely zero knowledge of AEW (or wrestling in general) to Grand Slam 2024.

AEW is a company which does many things that make me embarrassed to watch wrestling and many things that make me remember why I endure the unshakable stink associated with its fandom. I have a good feeling that this show is going to lean pretty heavily towards the latter, so I'm grateful for your taking the time to learn more about it.



Jonny Williams

Preface

What is professional wrestling? I hate to start any sort of documentation about an upcoming art performance with a definition of the artistic medium itself. Can you imagine a concert preview that starts with a clarification of what music is? Unfortunately, an explanation of sorts feels necessary due to the general American public's warped image of what exactly professional wrestling is: a lowbrow form of melodrama for adults riddled with one liners and physical altercations that *sometimes* happen in a wrestling ring. Or, as many people have put it to me, a soap opera for men.

Is this wrestling? Well, sure—a version of it at least. Like any other medium, there are a plethora of genres and styles to explore. World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) and its disgraced owner of four decades, Vince McMahon, monopolized the mainstream American market for the better part of the last 20 years with the presentation of wrestling that has become synonymous with the phrase “professional wrestling” itself. It's a shame, frankly, that the largest wrestling company in the world spent so much time abusing its spotlight in such a way that minimized the in-ring poetry in motion.

Case in point: ask any non-wrestling fan to recall what they remember or have seen of pro wrestling. You're sure to hear about some sort of hokey segment under ridiculous circumstances that occurred in front of a chanting crowd, backstage, or in a variety of “hilarious” locations. What about, oh, I don't know, the wrestling?

Of course, the public can't be blamed when this is all that they've been offered on a mainstream level for so long. In that respect, I, a passionate fan of wrestling as an artform, can't be blamed for saying that McMahon is a cancer to the medium. He has caused such irreparable damage to its reputation that I feel humiliation when strangers learn it's one of my life's great passions. McMahon is largely responsible for bringing wrestling to its current level of cultural recognition, but at what cost?

With that out of the way, let's start from the beginning: what is professional wrestling? Plainly, wrestling is an intersection of sport and art with a blurred line between reality and fiction—collaborative acrobatics with drama baked in. The outcome of matches are predetermined by a committee or leader within the company with the intent of progressing stories, teaching the audience about the wrestlers, and establishing a pecking order. Who wins and loses is only one piece of the puzzle that is booking a wrestling show. Other considerations include but are not limited to: how did the victor win, how did the defeated lose, what was at stake, and what will this result lead to? If things are as they're supposed to be, then results are carefully constructed in such a way that are logical and believable for an audience that is able and willing to watch a match/show with a

certain level of disbelief suspension. In this way, the medium shares a reliance on the audience not dissimilar to that of horror films.

The wrestlers themselves take the decisions handed down from the powers that be and construct a match beforehand with varying levels of preparation. Modern wrestling tends to have more pre-planning than the heavy amount of improvisation found in old school wrestling, but both eras feature creative decisions made backstage and on the fly.

Within these broad limitations, wrestling can be whatever you want it to be: serious, sad, revolting, impressive, or even funny. (Contrary to what WWE has taught audiences for decades, “funny” does not mean it has to be *stupid*.) And although most people’s introduction to wrestling is on television, it is first and foremost a live show meant to be experienced in person.

If you are willing to give professional wrestling a try without preconceived notions, rightfully or wrongfully brought upon itself, then I have a good feeling you will be pleasantly surprised at how much can be drawn from it. At the very least, I guarantee a spectacle.



Glossary

Specific to Grand Slam

All Elite Wrestling (AEW)

a professional wrestling company founded in 2019 by president Tony Khan alongside Executive Vice Presidents Cody Rhodes, Kenny Omega, and Matt and Nick Jackson (The Young Bucks) with the intent of providing an alternative to WWE's tyrannical grip on mainstream American wrestling

Dynamite

AEW's primary weekly television show with the purpose of progressing storylines and building towards pay-per-view (PPV) shows

Grand Slam

a special edition of AEW's weekly programming with cards that are generally stronger than their average television broadcast but slightly below that of a PPV

General

Booker/Booking Committee

(*n*) the individual or team responsible for deciding, or booking, who wins matches

Say what you want about Tony Khan, but overall he is a pretty solid booker.

Botch

(*n/v*) a mistake made by a wrestler

Bump

(*n*) the slam one takes from falling onto the ring/floor or taking a move

Face

(*n*) good guy

“For the sickos”

phrase used by Tony Khan to describe matches that are geared towards hardcore fans

Go over

(*v*) to win

Gimmick

¹ (*n*) a character

² (*v*) to manipulate something to be safer or more exciting

They had to have gimmicked that chair. There's no way they would let him do a chairshot to the head like that in 2024 otherwise.

Heat

(*n*) distaste towards a wrestler, whether intended or not

Heel

(*n*) bad guy

Kayfabe

(*n*) the fictional world and logic in which wrestling takes place

In kayfabe, The Undertaker is literally a wrestling dead person.

Selling

(*v*) the act of taking a move and acting injured

Darby Allin might have the best selling in the whole company.

Shoot

(*n/adj*) real

Oh my god, did you hear that thud? That headbutt was definitely a shoot.

Stiff

(adj) hard-hitting or rough

Do you see those elbows they're throwing? They're working really stiff tonight.

Turn

¹ *(n/v)* a change in a wrestler, usually from face to heel or vice-versa

I have found his work to be much more interesting ever since he turned heel.

² *(v)* to betray

I will never forgive Kota Minoura for turning on his friends in Gold Class.

Work

¹ *(n/v)* one's in-ring abilities

He can't cut a promo to save his life, but he's one of the best workers in the company.

² *(n/adv)* something that isn't "real"

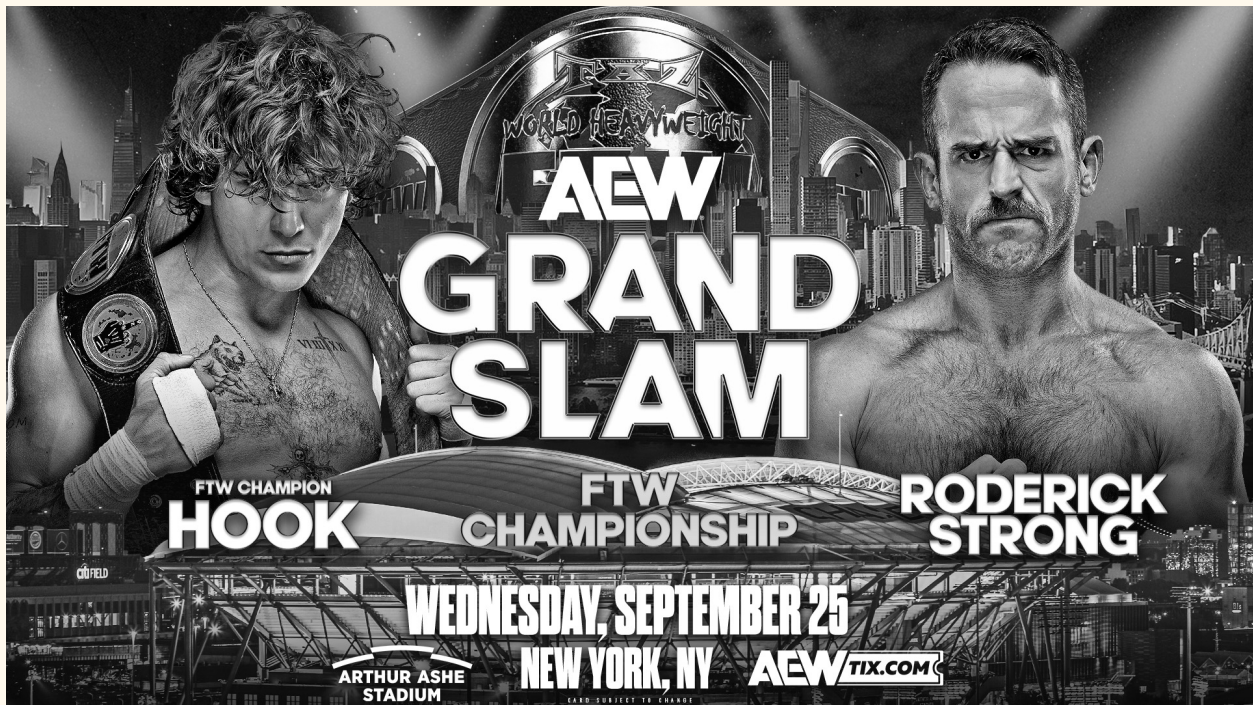
Don't worry, those are worked punches. He's not really hitting him that hard.

³ *(v)* performer's ability to manipulate the crowd

Do you hear all of those boo's? She's working the crowd so well right now.



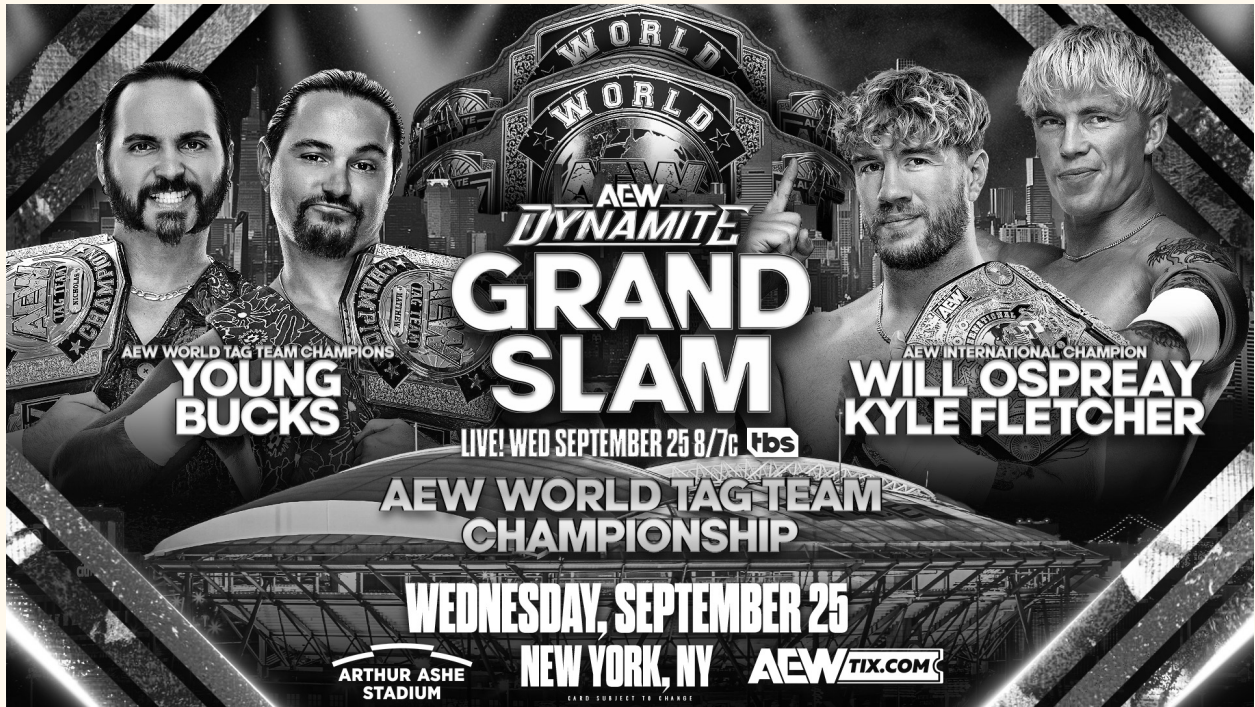
The Card



Hook (c) vs. Roderick Strong *for the FTW Championship*

Hook is the son of wrestling legend Taz of Extreme Championship Wrestling fame. He has been in the industry for less than 5 years, but has amassed a devoted following based purely on his inarguable aura. The more he works, however, the more his allure has slowly declined, as his inexperience has begun to show in the ring. Thankfully, his opponent is a long-time veteran and one of my favorite workers in the company. Roderick Strong is never going to be the top guy in any promotion, but he is one of the most reliable. The FTW title (yes, it stands for what you think it does) was created by Taz in the 90's, and is, frankly, a total non-factor in 2024. Despite this, I'm pretty excited for this match as a quiet Hook apologist and vocal Strong fan.

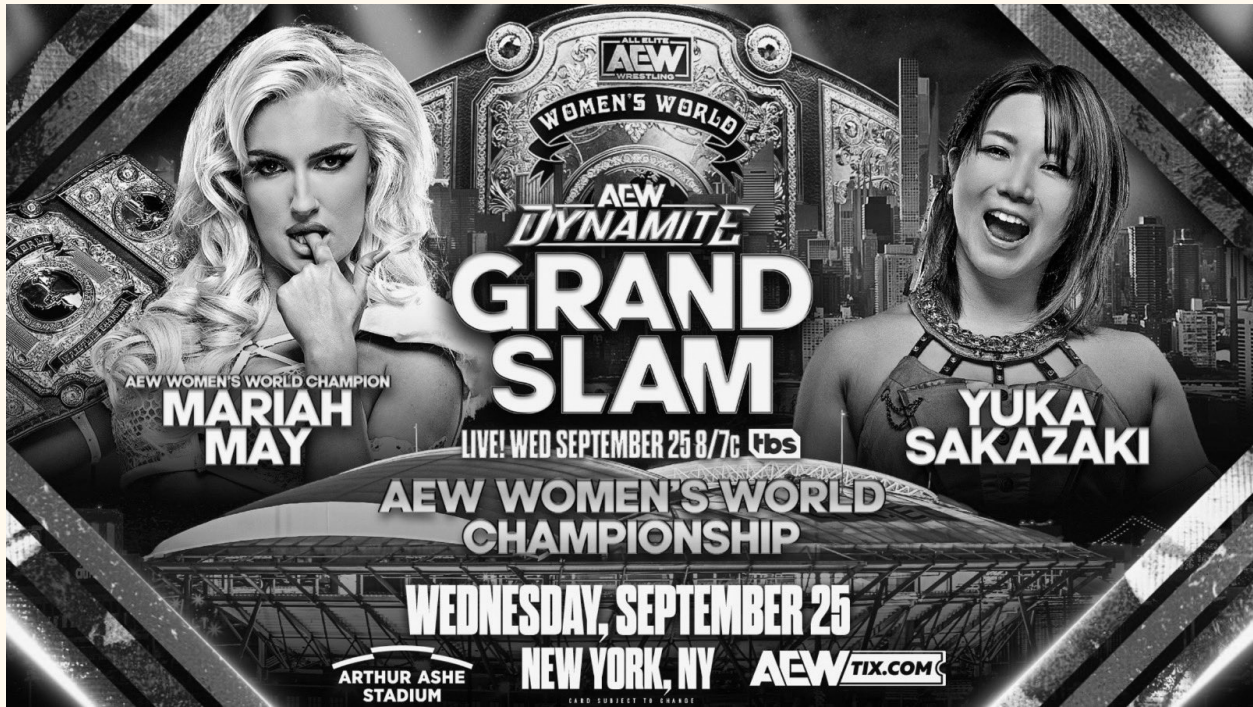
Prediction: Hook



Young Bucks (c) vs. Will Ospreay & Kyle Fletcher
for the AEW World Tag Team Championship

The Young Bucks are arguably the greatest tag team of all time, although you wouldn't know it based on their recent output. Their current gimmick is that they're, well, EVPs (which they are). In kayfabe, they're maliciously using their power within the company for their own gain, which is annoyingly similar to storylines beaten to death by WWE in the 2000s and 2010s. On the other side are Will Ospreay and his protege Kyle Fletcher, who won a tag team gauntlet match in order to earn this title shot. Ospreay is the AEW International Champion, considered the workrate belt in the company, and a top 3 wrestler in the world. Unless there is some sort of interference or shenanigans for storyline purposes, this is going to be an unreal match.

Prediction: Young Bucks



Mariah May (c) vs. Yuka Sakazaki
for the AEW Women's World Championship

Mariah May won her title at All In 2024 against former comrade, now nemesis Toni Storm in a match that was wonderfully worked and *stiff*. Neither should come as a surprise considering both cut their teeth in premiere Japanese women's promotion Stardom. (Joshi wrestling, the term used to describe women's wrestling in Japan, has a deep history known for its physical brutality and high standard of workrate.) Yuka Sakazaki was a prominent figure of Japanese promotion Tokyo Joshi Pro Wrestling until she announced her move to the United States in 2023. She only recently made her return to AEW after recovering from an injury, so I would say she has about a 0% chance of winning the title on such a short build. However, this match is still 100% worth paying attention to. Both wrestlers have proven to have the capacity to work more intensely than their gimmick would lead you to believe—May being a stereotypical blonde clad in pink and the “Magical Girl” Sakazaki being a genie (I think). I have casually been a fan of Sakazaki for a while and was impressed with May's recent performance that won her the title, so I am happy to see this on the card regardless of the predictable outcome.

Prediction: Mariah May

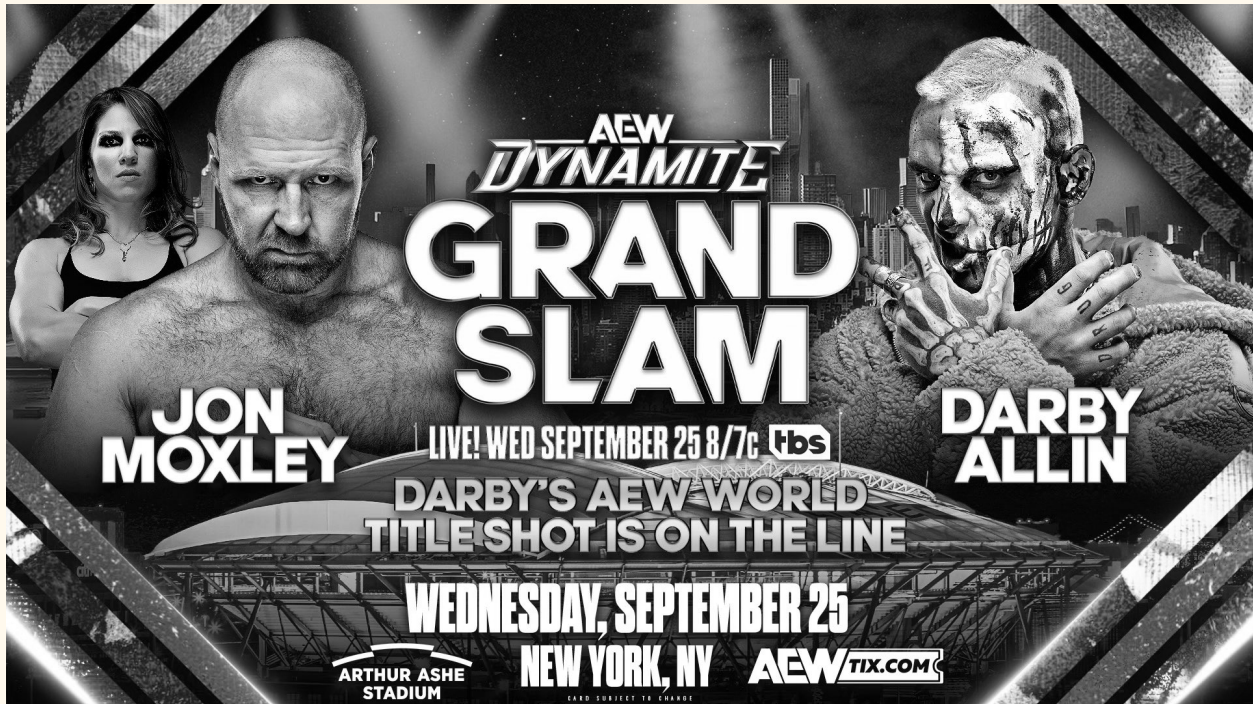


Bryan Danielson vs. Nigel McGuinness

non-title match

If somebody says that Bryan Danielson is the best American wrestler of all time, I'm not going to argue with them. His resume on the independent scene in the 2000s alone is enough to earn him this title, but his organic rise to the top in WWE and current run in AEW have more than solidified that statement. He just recently won the AEW World Championship, the company's top prize, and has said that he is to retire from full-time wrestling when he loses it. He wasn't expected to have a match on this show due to a recent attack from former stablemate Jon Moxley, who put a plastic bag over Danielson's head and tried to suffocate him. *If* Danielson is cleared to wrestle (it's a work, he will be), he will be facing long, *long* time nemesis Nigel McGuinness. These two had a legendary rivalry in American super-indie promotion Ring of Honor in the latter half of the 2000s. Like Danielson, McGuinness spent time in WWE and, like Danielson, was forced to retire by WWE due to injuries that prevented him from being medically cleared by company doctors. Unlike Danielson, McGuinness never got the comeback he always dreamed of. This will be his first singles match and second match in general since that "retirement." As a non-title match (I couldn't tell you as to why the title is not on the line), this will be a war fueled entirely by McGuinness's jealousy of Danielson's celebrated return that he feels should have been his.

Prediction: Bryan Danielson



Jon Moxley vs. Darby Allin
for Allin's AEW World Title shot

This match is the reason I am buying a ticket. I simply have to be in the building for what might be my favorite matchup in AEW. These two have squared off twice before in this promotion, although those matches were under much different circumstances. What was a mutual respect between two wrestlers known to march to the beat of their own drum has evolved into a complex rivalry.

Moxley's recent turn on former stablemate Bryan Danielson and the brutality in which he executed it was disturbing. In his mission for the AEW World Championship, Moxley has become a believable supervillain who is diabolically operating for his own gain. His new character lacks any sort of goofiness often associated with wrestling's prevalent obsession with comic books-esque villains—it just feels uncomfortably *real*.

In the opposite corner is Darby Allin, my favorite active American wrestler. He is often called the modern Jeff Hardy, which is apt even in appearance alone. Coming from the world of extreme skateboarding (think Instagram reels of dudes recklessly ollieing over a 30 stair set with no regard for their ankles), Allin's style is incredibly dangerous for his own body. What truly sets him apart from contemporaries, however, is meshing this methodology with his ballerina-esque movement and junior heavyweight agility. Oh yeah, and his entrance music is a song that Wicca Phase Springs Eternal wrote for him.

Moxley sees Allin's title shot, which he won in a 20-man battle royal two months ago, as the path of least resistance to Danielson. He coldly told Allin to give it to him, which obviously did not sit well with AEW's beloved underdog. Allin proceeded to lament the degradation of his view of Mox from inspiration to disgust. This is not the same Moxley that Allin idolized while sleeping in his car between matches on the indies, the same Moxley that left WWE on his own terms to pursue his vision of professional wrestling.

"You kind of sound like everybody that you hate in the back—self-entitled," said Allin on the 9/11/24 edition of Dynamite. "You didn't earn this [title shot], Jon. *I* earned this. And I'm not just going to give it to you. If you want it so bad, do something about it."

And so here we are. Moxley has no ill will towards Allin—he just wants Danielson. Allin, however, is emotional and wants to take down the bully that he thinks Moxley has become.

Moxley's aggressive bruiser style is a perfect pairing for Allin's rabid offense and masterful selling. Expect the latter to take some bumps that will bring pause.

Prediction: Jon Moxley

Final Thoughts

Jon Moxley vs. Darby Allin alone is worth the price of admission. Bryan Danielson vs. Nigel McGuinness alone is worth the price of admission. Young Bucks vs. Will Ospreay and Kyle Fletcher alone is worth the price of admission. While Mariah May vs. Yuka Sakazaki and Hook vs. Roderick Strong likely aren't moving any tickets on their own, they are worthwhile additions to an already loaded card. Since this is technically a Dynamite and not a PPV, the chances of shenanigans affecting the finishes of these matches is unfortunately a real possibility. Even still, Grand Slam promises to be a night of professional wrestling worth rearranging your schedule to watch live whether you are a new or veteran fan of the company.

