

TITAN © VS. BARBARO CAVERNARIO

MAY 3

CMLL

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CMLL is not the first promotion in history – nor will they be the last – to take for granted the riches of young talent they have on their roster. Unfortunately, that fact does not make CMLL’s current reality any less frustrating. With guys like Dragon Lee, Puma, Panther, Titan, La Sombra and Barbaro Cavernario, CMLL has six wrestlers under the age of 25 that any promotion in the world could build around. Throw in other good under-25 year olds like Bobby Zavala and Soberano, plus a plethora of talented luchadores under 30 including (but not limited to) Rush, Tiger, and Mascara Dorada, and it is clear that CMLL is drowning in talented young luchadores, but how they utilize that talent is much more hit-or-miss.

Negro Casas is great and the old guard tends to do better at the box office, but at some point CMLL has to pass the baton and feature the guys that – for better or worse – will determine their future.

A match like this – featuring two sub-25 year olds and former *En Busca de un Idolo* winners – serves as evidence that these young guys are ready, they just need to be handed the ball.

Titan and Cavernario had a very strong match in 2014 for Titan’s Mexican National Welterweight championship, which finished 8th on my Match of the Year list. They took the lucha title match structure but bent and stretched it to create something that felt both familiar and unique. The second fall was as long – if not longer – than the third fall, which made for an interesting alteration to the normal (current) CMLL title match structure. They weaved their truly high-end moves into the fabric of the match rather well. The near falls weren’t quite there and the mat work felt perfunctory, but those were the only two elements keeping the match from being really, really special.

Less than a year removed from their first encounter, it was immediately obvious how much both wrestlers have grown in such a short time. They worked the mat far longer than they did in last year’s title match. I liked the work but I also liked the progression. They appeared more comfortable in their skin and confident that they

could work holds – in their own stylistic manner – without losing the crowd. This was not Virus-quality mat work or anything, but basic tone setting stuff that was handled well.

There were other elements that support the idea that both Titan (24) and Cavernario (21) are wise beyond their years in the ring.

For instance, there were more than a couple of spots during the match that paid homage to their previous matches. They didn’t hit you over the head with these spots nor were the callbacks essential components of the match, but it is always appreciated when a re-match builds off of the previous match or matches. I got the sense that Cavernario and Titan were in no way interested in simply regurgitating their successful match layout from last summer. The way they played off of spots from their previous match in different ways demonstrated that. On a similar note, Titan turned the tables on Cavernario by doing the splash to the floor himself. There is not much aping other guy’s finishers in modern CMLL – relative to a promotion like WWE – so that spot really stood out as special.

The desire to change things up also showed in the layout of the falls. The first fall was longer – and as mentioned, heavier on the holds – than their 2014 title bout. The second fall was shorter while the third was more or less laid out the same in both matches. However, the work was different. There was more striking here, which I found both good and bad. The strikes themselves looked fine but they did do the Japanese back-and-forth routine a little too much for my personal tastes. That is not something I generally want from lucha. You see a lot of the Japanese striking influence on the Mexico indies but not so much in CMLL and to be fair, this was in no way was this Indystrongtibles level stuff, so it wasn’t that bad just a bit out of place in terms of personal preference. If New Japan ever wakes up and realizes that their junior division could get a huge and much needed boost by an influx of CMLL wrestlers, this match shows that both Titan and Cavernario (who do have some Japan experience) are able and willing to adapt to that style.

Perhaps most importantly, the crowd reacted to the match like an anticipated title fight and I had the same feeling watching it at home. While I am hard pressed to remember a singular spectacular near fall, there were a lot of solid ones and the crowd was clearly invested in the outcome. The third fall had the usual assortment of higher impact moves and close calls. They built it well and when Canverario caught Titan off guard in his submission hold, it felt like the exact right ending at the right time.

On first take, I think this is one of the better matches of the year and about on par with their 2014 match, if not a notch above. What is even more exciting is that it is obvious that Titan and Canverario both have a ways to go before maxing out their potential. These are two wrestlers under 25 years old who have had two * * * * 1/4 matches versus one another in a year's time and they still have something much better in them once they get more experience. That is really, really impressive. CMLL's future is bright, if they want it to be.