

## VIRUS © VS. DRAGON LEE

APRIL 5

CMLL

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All good things come to an end. After 1,398 days, Virus' CMLL World Lightweight championship reign – and more to the point, the excellent 3-fall Virus matches it was giving us – has sadly reached its conclusion.

After defeating Guerrero Maya Jr. in the finals of a tournament for the vacant title in June of 2011, Virus made two defenses in short order, one of which (a title defense in Puebla opposite of Dragon Lee I/Mistico II) might not have even aired. As CMLL is prone to do, they forgot the title existed for a lengthy period of time. An entire year passed before Virus made another defense, this time versus Fuego in Puebla in October 2012. Again another year went by before Virus retained his title against the man he beat in the tournament final to win it in the first place, Guerrero Maya, in a great match. For perhaps no particular reason at all, CMLL used the 2013 Maya Jr. match as the jumping off point for a string of Virus title matches. After defending the title just twice over two years, Virus wrestled three Lightweight title matches in 2014 alone (along with challenging Titan for the Mexican National Welterweight title that year).

Virus title matches are never bad. The Titan Welterweight title match, Guerrero Maya Jr. matches, and the first Dragon Lee title defense were very good matches, the former of which was my favorite match of 2014. The fact that a title-less Virus almost certainly means less non-Lightning Virus singles matches is disappointing.

Virus' title reign went out with a match that was more bang than whimper, although probably somewhere more in the middle. This wasn't high-end Virus singles match work like the Titan match, the second Guerrero Maya Jr. match, or his first title defense versus the current Dragon Lee. It was comfortably above both the Fuego and Sigma title matches from 2014.

What has made Virus title matches such a joy to watch is his masterful ability to lead opponents of all types through crisp, complete, and well executed matches. Virus title matches start in traditional lucha title match style with a first fall that is contested 90% or more on the

mat. The second fall usually starts with a continuation of the first fall. The winner of the first fall will come out strong – often times targeting a limb – before the loser of the first fall evens things up with a comeback at the end. The 3rd fall is a near fall intensive one in most Virus title matches, although not to the level that many other modern day CMLL title matches get to.

This was the pattern used in the Titan match and all of Virus' 2014 title defenses. It was also the pattern used here. It's a time tested format. How good the matches have been has largely been a function of how good the first fall mat work is and how much drama/heat they can create at the end of the 3rd fall. As good as he is, Virus is not a machine so his performances have wavered a bit match-to-match, but the performances of his opponents have largely driven the match quality. Titan was very smooth on the mat with Virus and brought quality flying to the near fall sections. Dragon Lee – in his first title shot late last year – rolled well with Virus and likewise brought a needed flying element.

In the first fall, the mat work was good but not great by Virus standards. Dragon Lee was a little loose and perhaps somewhat tentative as well during the mat portions. He did not flow as smoothly with Virus on the mat as he did in their 2014 title match. The mat work was in no way bad, but it just was not as tight as Virus mat work can be.

After picking up the first fall, Dragon Lee started the second fall on offense as expected. As has also been the case in many Virus title matches, the winner of the first fall targets a body part to open up the second fall. In this instance, Dragon Lee went after Virus' legs with kicks and holds. Dragon Lee's decision to try to beat Virus at his own game with the leg work ended up coming with a heavy price. Virus turned the tables and went after Lee's leg instead. Virus is always great when he is relentlessly targeting his opponent's leg. There was a mix of viciousness and science to it. He is hurting his opponent bad but in a very calculated manner. The leg work was a way to give Virus' offense an added layer of focus but even more so was there so that Dragon Lee would have

something to fight back from in the third fall. Dragon Lee sold the leg as it was being worked on and it threw in a little bit of hobbled rope running for good measure.

The third fall was the strongest portion of the match. In other Virus' title matches, the mat work-heavy first falls have stood out above or at least equal to the near fall-heavy third fall, but that was not exactly the case here. Dragon Lee is reckless in the way he flies and Virus was a great catcher for him. There were many impressive spots and some well-executed false finishes on both sides. They fooled me a couple of times late. Dragon Lee's double stomp looked brutal and was an appropriate end to the match.

Virus has had better singles matches, but there is always some grading on a curve going on with him. A merely good Virus title match is still a great match. The mat work did not reach the peaks it often does (much of which can probably be attributed to Dragon Lee) but Virus' mat work is never dull. The leg work was a nice bridge and set up for the comeback, while the third fall was probably as good as anything from the first Dragon Lee/Virus title match. If this was the last Virus title match we get for a while (and God willing, it won't be), then it was a fine way to go out.