

Synopsis

Well first of all, the narrator's like "After we advertised one of the brand new pokemon you can get in the game that you should purchase right now, Ash moves on to his next advertisement", as they head to Violet City to have a violent battle. No, that's not the only time I'll make that joke. On the way, if the narrator wasn't enough, then we get even more product placement! Ok, ok I KNOW the whole show is a giant product placement itself but there's using a product to tell stories and then there's "put down those entertaining Mattel toys!"

"If only there was a way I could have ALL THREE!"

"You can, Brock! You just need to steal your dad's credit card and buy both versions, a new gameboy and a link cable, available at your nearest Toys 'R Us!"

"Ash, what are you-"

"Sorry, blacked out for a second, what was that?"

Then they come across an adorably quirky trainer of the week who seems to have a thing for sports, can't for the life of me figure out which one she specializes in though, man, this is going to kill me... water polo, maybe? Oh well, Brock's all "Hey, it's that thing that I wanted to see! Time to ignore it while Ash takes centre stage!" "aw, you're fitting right back in, Brock!" So while the trainer aggressively encourages chikorita's tassel twirling, the twerps stand back and let brock run MORE of the marketing patter! Geez, guys, step back a bit!

"Perhaps now she will gather eight badges while keeping Chikoirta in her party at all times as well as a Furret she only uses to move rocks and cut trees! Sounds like fun fun fun for a very competitive price!"

Meanwhile the trainer battles a wild rattata and spends a seriously indulgent time prepping her attack.

"...and it's fainted. Probably should have called an attack, huh?" "Chiiikuuuu..."

No, of course Chicorita knocks rattata the crap out and Casey throws a ball at the warm body, much to the chagrin of every kid watching who played the games. She catches it too!

Aw, that's adorable... wait, is... is she talking to us?

Well, sure, I guess I'd better stand for the anthem...

Aw, come on guys, sure it's a little cringey but this is nowhere near the weirdest sight you've stumbled onto and you know it! You've walked in on a candlelight vigil around a treadmill for Arceus' sake! Then she turns around and she's all PIKACHU! PIKACHU SHOCK ME UNTIL I FEEL SOMETHING!" "Hey, you know I -"
*just do it"

I just love pikachu's expression through all this. "This is causing moral quandaries I had heretofore not considered..."

So they walk off their thundershock therapy and Casey here introduces herself properly.

"YOU DON'T SAY!"

Yep, Casey's part of a fanbase for a team called the electabuzz, known for their energetic fervour despite their team always losing big time.

WOW, imagine losing to the magikarp. Heck, even the starmie doesn't sound too great when considering it's history in the show: One strike and it's out! Then Ash actually throws some pretty fierce shade on Casey's team, let's be honest here,

ohhh
to which Casey is, of course, mildly chagrined.

To which Ash responds with.. Surprise? Really, ash?
"I insulted a pokemon trainer's favorite sports team that she's so passionate about she chants about them when no one's looking... while making eye contact! Whoever could have predicted this outcome?"

So they begin their match and Casey being the rookie she is, sends out

"Ah yes, those carefree days of catching pidgey when I was so incompetent even my equipment insulted me! Maybe shouldn't have said that out loud..."

Then Ash freaking GANKS Casey by bringing out Charizard! Not cool, bro, at least use a smurf account! Wonder how well THAT sentence will age... anyway, I do like Brock's reaction, because remember he's still not used to an obedient Charizard.

So unfortunately, pidgey is defeated by nostril flare after the world's cutest tackle attack...

And Casey brings out Rattata who embarrassingly gets beaten by Belly Drum after the second cutest tackle attack. But after Ash is all “Charizard’s so hardcore I should change his name to Sepultura!”

The sneer has gone from Casey’s lip, her teeth are clenched in hate.
She sends with cruel violence her starter across the plate,
And now the grass-type grabs the neck and tightens like a noose,
And Casey’s pride is shattered as a bushfire cuts him loose.

Sobs that was the most adorable burn status I’ve ever seen in my 32 years! Aw, I just want to cuddle-wuddle it! Ash actually tries to be all magnanimous in victory despite the aforementioned ganking and Casey of course doesn’t take it too well. Ash is all “What’s her problem? All I did was insult both her greatest passions and utterly crush both her dreams and her party! Kids can be so sensitive, you know?”

Yeah, ‘cos Ash has been so gracious in defeat before..

Then we see Casey’s backstory and oof, it’d be hard to make it more heartwrenching...
“Oh, and your dear sweet grampapa who gave you your hat and trumpet thing promises he won’t allow us to unplug the life support until you lose!” Kind of makes Ash out to be even more of a jerk, really...

Then Team Rocket show up and immediately gain Casey’s trust through reciting the cheer... somewhat awkwardly...

Come on guys, I know you’ve got experience in cheerleading, put some pepper into it! Well, then they do some of the polar opposite to cheerleading by pulling a smear campaign in Ash.

To be fair, that really should be a rule if it isn’t. Boy, I kind of feel bad for going back and annihilating the trainers in the early routes in my post game now... “Hi! I like shorts! They’re comfy and *FWWOOOOOSH*... easily soiled.”

So after they finish successfully wormtongue-ing Casey... that sounds bad,
just do it

They promise to help her get back at Ash. Then suddenly baseball field what?
Baseball? Field? What? Field what? Just... right into it, huh? Well, I guess I can respect

that, let's do it! Honestly I'm just surprised Team rocket didn't supply the stadium, we know they can get one pretty fast... Then we get this gem from Brock:

And the battle begins! Ash at least chooses a pokemon of a similar weight class to chikorita this time, and Casey seems to have moved beyond the "tackle til they fall over" strat. She even lands a clean hit on pikachu before team rocket make it weird, as they are wont to do.

Heh, I like that Gotta catch 'em all can work for baseball, too. James is also impressed, it seems!

OOOOFFF, I felt that deep in my dad gland. Meanwhile chikorita is actually doing surprisingly well, putting it's training and typing to good use. But then Team rocket bring out a bat-tank, and I ain't talking dark knight here...

Casey at first is all "More hacks? Give me a break you troll!" and Ash is all "Hey, don't accuse your opponent of cheating just because they won! That's my thing!" then -

OWWWW that sounded so painful, felt that in my teeth I did! Team rocket then catch the recently concussed pokemon and try to cheese it, but of course they have to do the thing first. HMM, I WONDER WHAT THE THEME WILL BE?

Yep, and after that surprisingly heart warming motto, they proceed to attempt manslaughter via bludgeoning.

FFff... ahh, what is with this episode and actually painful looking hits? Then Ash does his pep talk which is great, but I'm not sure about his metaphors...

"You just keep taking hits until you black out! That's what baseball is all about!" Luckily Casey is still inspired and she whips out her aluminium bat painted to look like wood, if these hit sounds are anything to go by...

And then after casey bats a thousand, she and Ash order the pokemon to hit a fly ball into a home run. Great, now I'm doing it...

So they part ways on good terms, we get this wonderful exchange with excellent lip flap matching...

And then Brock is all “I wanna make out with her sister!” “You made it weird, Brock.”
...sorry”

Thoughts

Simple and clean is the way that this episode feels tonight, despite all the foul balls being thrown.

This was a wonderfully strong, energetic and just plain fun character of the week episode, almost the one by which to judge all others to come. Casey immediately makes an impression on multiple levels, with a striking design, fresh quirk and strong characterization, at least as much as can be expected in pokémon. You know what her motivations are, she has a clear goal and you can't fault her boundless enthusiasm. Normally someone this manic can get tiresome, but the fact the writers knew when to reign her in coupled with her adorably INTENSE attitude really left an impression. You were invested in the battles, even the steam rollings because you could just feel her passion without it going over the edge into bratty kid territory.

Speaking of those battles though, they were just awesome, clever and intense when they weren't hilarious. The animation overall was top notch too, and once again it WASN'T Yuji Asada and Masaaki Iwane this time! You can tell, too, there's more of an emphasis on solid motion and weighty movement rather than the rubbery exaggeration the former team is known for. This is the same animation director that also stood out to me in *The Rivalry Revival*, Katsumi Hashimoto, and the storyboarder is Hasashi Shina making his debut here. I'm really looking forward to seeing what else these two have to offer in the future.

There were a couple of missteps, with team rocket's stadium shenanigans going a little too far into goofy territory and Ash being more of an oblivious jerk than he normally is, but the central theme of the episode - looking through the fresh eyes of a brand new trainer - was inspired for an early episode, causing nostalgia for long time watchers and a good starting point for new viewers. Casey has amazing potential as a recurring character, although from what I hear it doesn't happen nearly enough. Still I guess it's better than outstaying your welcome.

It's not perfect, but it doesn't need to be. Not a homerun, but it ran the bases beautifully. Oh fine, no more baseball stuff, but basically it was an episode that did nothing wrong and made me feel like a kid again. It's an Ultra ball.

Trivia

We gotta lotta great trivia for you guys tonight! First of all let's get the most striking aspects out of the way first. Casey's whole bit is based on the fandom of an extremely famous Japanese baseball team, the Hanshin Tigers, to the point that the colors are even the same. Their equivalent in the west would probably be Red Sox or Chicago Cubs fans, ludicrously fanatical in their devotion to a team without much going for them in the way of stats, to the point that they often outnumber the home team crowds at away games! The fact that the electabuzz always came last was a reference to the tigers abysmal record, attributed to a curse caused by a drowned Colonel Sanders Statue. NO I'M NOT JOKING LOOK IT UP. Yeah, Japan's official sport may be Sumo, but it's most popular by far is baseball. You have NO IDEA how much baseball manga is out there. It's NUTS. In fact team rocket's motto this episode was a reference to one of the most popular baseball manga and anime, Kyojin No Hoshi. Shout out to dogasu for these great reference shots.

The references to the hanshin tigers go super deep too, with the balloons being released in the stadium being a nod to a Tigers seventh inning tradition, the two rival teams ash mention - the Starmie and the Magikarp - are references to the BaySTARS of Yokohama and the hiroshima Koi, and the chant that Casey recites is of course a modified version of one Tigers fans use. The japanese version even uses the same imagery just to hammer it in. Then when Team rocket are smearing Ash, in the Japanese rather than breaking an anti-ganking law, they're saying that ash donates money to "that other team," referring to long time Tigers rivals, the Yomiuri Giants. I guess they'd be the Machamps?

Also in Japanese, Casey speaks in a thick kansai dialect, as of course that's the region Hanshin is in. In Japan this is the equivalent of a super thick accent, so I'm surprised and disappointed they didn't give her a big ol' bawston accent to connect it better with the red sox, but oh well, maybe it would have been too similar to meowth's.

But finally moving on from the tigers and onto more generic changes, there's one thing that I'm actually very surprised 4kds DIDN'T change: the scoreboard actually still has an S and an N there, which stands for Satoshi and Nanako, their japanese names. I would have thought it would be easy to change them to an A and a C, but maybe they were on a deadline.

One place where they DID edit it is when Ash is beamed several times by the batting bots. 4kids repurposed these impact stars so that we in the US didn't see these fantastically gruesome impacts. Boo! I loved this one so much I used it in the titlecard even though I never saw it! Moving onto a couple of much more understandable edits,

they removed the letters from the tower in the background of Casey's flashback even though they were english characters for what I'm hoping is obvious reasons. Heh heh... poop. And for the most justified change of all we turn to Brock, who in english when we leave Casey gives the slightly skeezy remark of

This is a replacement of the SERIOUSLY skeezy remark in japanese, where he says "she could be a lot of fun in 8 years." Ugh, shivered just saying that.

To cleanse the palate though, let's finish off with Casey's name. Those of you in the US probably already know this, but it's a reference to a very famous US comedy poem, Casey at the bat. I'd recommend the disney version of it from 1946 for a good laugh, even if it's very different from the original poem.

Patrons

Oh, somewhere in this favored land the pokemon shine bright;
Where ash is being stupid, and somewhere bugs will fight,
and somewhere Suede is laughing, and somewhere he will shout;
but will there be joy for viewers — or will Pokemon strike out?