

Proving Grounds: Episode 2: "Say It So They Feel It"

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Episode 2: "Say It So They Feel It"

OPENING TEASE

Quick flashes. Boone holding a microphone like he wants to break it. Roxie smiling in someone's face while they unravel. Lena blinking back frustrated tears. Scott Stevens standing in the ring, unimpressed. Jace and Silas jawing nose to nose. Darren cutting a clean, direct line into the camera. Melissa Cartwright watching from ringside, measuring everything.

SCOTT STEVENS (V.O.): "Anybody can memorize words. The hard part is making somebody believe you mean them."

Hard cut to black.

ON SCREEN: PROVING GROUNDS

SCENE ONE - MORNING AFTER

Morning in the house. The air is a little tighter now. Day one politeness is thinning. In the kitchen, Jace stands at the counter making coffee while Boone leans against the island eating dry toast like it offended him.

JACE VAN ARDENT: "You always this cheerful before sunrise?"

BOONE MERCER: "You always this talkative?"

JACE VAN ARDENT: "Usually more."

Boone almost smiles despite himself.

Across the room, Darren enters in a fitted black training top, hair set, already looking camera-ready. Boone notices immediately.

BOONE MERCER: "You sleep in makeup too, or is that natural?"

DARREN VALIANT: "This? This is effortless. You should try it."

BOONE MERCER: "I'd rather try breakfast."

Confessional.

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DARREN VALIANT: "Boone thinks not caring how he presents himself is a personality. It's not. It's laziness with a scowl."

Upstairs in the Roxie/Lena room, Lena is practicing lines into the mirror under her breath. Roxie is still in bed, watching.

ROXIE RAZE: "You know the mirror can't grade you, right?"

LENA LUX: "I'm just trying not to bomb today."

ROXIE RAZE: "That's already a bad mindset. You don't walk into promo day hoping not to fail. You walk in expecting people to remember you."

LENA LUX: "Easy for you to say."

ROXIE RAZE: "Yes. It is."

Confessional.

LENA LUX: "I know Roxie's trying to get under my skin. The annoying part is... sometimes she says things that are true."

In Malik and Silas's room, Malik finishes tying his boots while Silas buttons a plain black overshirt with surgical focus.

MALIK STEELE: "You ready?"

SILAS VALE: "For people to confuse volume with presence? Sure."

MALIK STEELE: "That your plan? Show them you're smarter than the room?"

SILAS VALE: "My plan is to be better than the room. If that reads as smarter, that's not my fault."

Malik just shakes his head.

SCENE TWO - TRAINING FACILITY / PROMO DAY REVEAL

The recruits enter the UTA facility. A ring sits in the center as before, but now extra cameras are set up at ringside and a chair with a handheld mic rests near the apron. Scott Stevens stands in the ring. Melissa Cartwright is beside him in business-casual attire, holding a clipboard.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Yesterday, some of you showed me presence. Today, we find out if that presence survives pressure."

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SCOTT STEVENS: "This is promo week. Not catchphrases. Not impressions. Not noise. Communication."

He gestures toward Melissa.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Melissa Cartwright knows how to listen. She knows when somebody is dodging, when somebody is deflecting, and when somebody is actually saying something real. She's here because if you want to be in UTA, sooner or later somebody's putting a microphone in your face."

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "And if you don't know who you are when that happens, people can tell."

SCOTT STEVENS: "You'll have three tests today. First: live interview. Second: rebuttal. Third: direct challenge. By the end of the day, we'll know who can talk, who can react, and who collapses the second the script disappears."

The recruits exchange looks. Boone hates it already. Roxie looks thrilled.

SCENE THREE - TEST ONE: THE INTERVIEW

One by one, the recruits sit in a chair in the ring while Melissa asks them the same simple question:

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "Why should WrestleUTA invest in you?"

The others watch from ringside.

First up: Malik Steele.

MALIK STEELE: "Because I'm built for hard environments. I don't get rattled. I learn fast. I improve fast. And if this company wants somebody who can become dangerous in a short amount of time, that's me."

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "That tells me what you can become. What are you now?"

Malik pauses. Too long.

MALIK STEELE: "I'm... someone worth developing."

Scott's face says the answer was not enough.

Next: Tatum Quinn.

TATUM QUINN: "WrestleUTA should invest in me because I'm reliable, coachable, and serious about the work. I don't waste time. I don't waste reps. And I don't make excuses."

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "What do you make people feel?"

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Tatum blinks once. It lands harder than a shout would have.

TATUM QUINN: "Respect."

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "That's useful. It's not the whole job."

Next: Boone Mercer.

BOONE MERCER: "WrestleUTA should invest in me because people believe pain when I'm in front of them. They believe the fight. They believe the work. I don't need to make myself prettier than I am."

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "Do you think polished is fake?"

BOONE MERCER: "Usually."

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "That sounds more like resentment than identity."

Boone's jaw tightens. That one got through.

Next: Lena Lux.

LENA LUX: "WrestleUTA should invest in me because I'm hungry, I'm coachable, and I'm not afraid to be the person in the room who still has to prove it."

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "What makes you different?"

LENA LUX: "I... I think because I know I'm not finished yet."

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "That's honest. But it still sounds like you're asking for time instead of demanding opportunity."

Lena deflates a little.

Next: Silas Vale.

SILAS VALE: "WrestleUTA should invest in me because I'm disciplined enough to become excellent, and disciplined enough not to confuse approval with progress."

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "Who do you want the audience to see?"

SILAS VALE: "Someone better than the person across from me."

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "That's not a person. That's a ranking."

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A few recruits wince. Clean hit.

Next: Roxie Raze.

ROXIE RAZE: "WrestleUTA should invest in me because I'm not invisible. I know how to get attention, keep it, and turn it into something that matters. I can fight, I can speak, and I don't disappear when pressure shows up."

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "What scares you?"

For the first time, Roxie has to actually think.

ROXIE RAZE: "Wasting time."

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "That was better."

Roxie nods slightly. She knows it was.

Next: Jace Van Ardent.

JACE VAN ARDENT: "WrestleUTA should invest in me because I can make people feel energy. I can make them look up. I can make them believe something's about to happen when I move. That matters."

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "And when the crowd isn't there?"

JACE VAN ARDENT: "Then I have to create the reason they would be."

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "That's closer."

Good, but not electric.

Last: Darren Valiant.

DARREN VALIANT: "WrestleUTA should invest in me because I understand the difference between being talented and being undeniable. Talent gets you invited. Being undeniable gets you remembered. I know how to make an audience react, how to make an opponent matter, and how to make a moment feel bigger than it looked on paper."

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "What happens if people stop reacting?"

DARREN VALIANT: "Then I gave them the wrong version of me."

Melissa lowers the mic. That lands.

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MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "That's self-awareness. Keep it."

SCENE FOUR - FIRST FEEDBACK

The recruits stand in the ring while Scott and Melissa evaluate.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Some of you answered the question. Some of you dodged the question. And some of you exposed the exact thing holding you back."

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "A lot of you are still describing traits instead of identity. Athletic. Tough. Disciplined. Coachable. Fine. But none of that tells me who you are when the lights come on."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Second test. Rebuttal."

SCENE FIVE - TEST TWO: REBUTTAL DRILL

The recruits draw names. They will stand in the ring opposite each other. One speaks first. The other gets twenty seconds to respond with no preparation.

Pairing One: Roxie Raze vs Lena Lux

Roxie goes first, of course.

ROXIE RAZE: "Lena, you talk like a résumé in human form. Hungry. Coachable. Hard-working. Great. So is everybody here. The difference is the second somebody presses on you, you start sounding like you're asking permission to stay."

Lena stares at her, jaw tight. The room is waiting to see if she folds.

LENA LUX: "Maybe I do sound nervous sometimes. Maybe I do care too much about getting it right. But at least I'm real enough to let people see it. You? You act like nothing gets to you because you think being untouchable looks strong. It doesn't. It looks lonely."

That surprises everyone, including Roxie.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Better."

Pairing Two: Jace Van Ardent vs Silas Vale

SILAS VALE: "Jace is what happens when talent gets comfortable being liked. He moves well, smiles easily, and makes a room feel better about itself. That's cute. Until the job requires depth."

Jace rolls the mic in his hand once, eyes locked on Silas.

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JACE VAN ARDENT: "You keep talking like being cold makes you serious. It doesn't. It makes you easy to admire from far away and impossible to care about up close. Depth isn't sounding like you swallowed a philosophy book. Depth is giving people a reason to stay with you."

Silas steps closer. Tension instantly spikes.

Pairing Three: Darren Valiant vs Boone Mercer

BOONE MERCER: "Darren looks like money until you realize half of what he does is make sure you're watching him know he looks like money. That ain't confidence. That's maintenance."

Darren smiles. A little too calmly.

DARREN VALIANT: "And Boone hides behind 'real' because it's easier than evolving. Every time you sneer at polish, all I hear is fear. You're not mad I'm put together. You're mad it matters."

Boone takes a step forward. Scott immediately raises a hand.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Control it."

Pairing Four: Tatum Quinn vs Malik Steele

TATUM QUINN: "Malik has every tool in the room except one: clarity. You can see the athlete, but you still can't see the man."

Malik considers that before responding.

MALIK STEELE: "Tatum's right about one thing: I'm still opening up. But the difference between us is I know I'm still becoming something. You already talk like you think you've arrived."

Tatum takes that one seriously.

SCOTT STEVENS: "All four of those were useful. Some more than others."

SCENE SIX - HOUSE INTERLUDE / LUNCH BREAK

Backstage lunch area. The recruits are sweaty, frustrated, and processing feedback.

Lena sits alone for a moment until Tatum walks up and sets a water bottle in front of her.

TATUM QUINN: "That line about Roxie being lonely? That was the first time you stopped asking people to accept you."

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LENA LUX: "Was that a compliment?"

TATUM QUINN: "Don't get used to it."

Across the room, Boone is pacing. Darren sits on a production crate, unbothered.

BOONE MERCER: "You think you got me figured out?"

DARREN VALIANT: "No. I think I got you bothered. That's easier."

BOONE MERCER: "You keep poking."

DARREN VALIANT: "And you keep reacting. That's promo math."

Melissa watches from a distance, saying nothing. Useful television is brewing on its own.

SCENE SEVEN - TEST THREE: DIRECT CHALLENGE

The recruits return to the ring. Scott lays out the final exercise.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Last test. No interviewer. No opponent chosen for you. One at a time, you're taking a mic and calling out somebody in this house. You tell them what you think of them, what you think of yourself, and why you're ahead or why you're coming for them. Thirty seconds. Then the other person gets thirty back."

The recruits murmur. This is the real one.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Darren. Start."

Darren takes the mic and turns immediately toward Boone. No hesitation.

DARREN VALIANT: "Boone, you keep looking at me like I'm everything wrong with this process, but that's because I'm standing where you thought effort alone would put you. You don't hate polish. You hate being measured against it."

Boone takes the return mic.

BOONE MERCER: "No, Darren. I hate people who treat this like a mirror instead of a fight. But I'll give you this -- at least now I know what you are. You're not soft. You're just in love with being seen."

That one gets a reaction from the room.

Next: Roxie.

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Roxie turns to Lena again, but this time something in her tone changes. It is still sharp, but less dismissive.

ROXIE RAZE: "Lena, you annoy me because I can see you trying not to take up space. Stop that. Nobody here is giving you room. You take it or you go home."

Lena looks surprised, then answers.

LENA LUX: "Maybe I'm not as loud as you. Maybe I never will be. But I'm done acting grateful just to be in the room. You want to keep coming at me? Fine. Just don't act shocked if one day I come through you."

Scott nods slightly. That's the version he wanted.

Next: Jace.

Jace turns to Silas.

JACE VAN ARDENT: "Silas, for someone who talks so much about standards, you spend a lot of time making sure nobody gets close enough to see if you actually have a pulse. You don't scare me. You just exhaust me."

Silas takes the return.

SILAS VALE: "And you are what people settle for when they want the feeling of substance without the work of it. You're easy to digest, Jace. That doesn't make you important."

Jace starts forward. Scott cuts it off again with a look.

Next: Malik.

Malik turns to the whole room first, then lands on Tatum.

MALIK STEELE: "Tatum's right that I'm still finding the clearest version of me. But here's the difference -- I'm not afraid to admit I'm still building. A lot of people in this room are protecting an image. I'm building a foundation."

Tatum answers calmly.

TATUM QUINN: "Then build faster. Because potential is only impressive until someone else actually becomes something."

Short, sharp, effective.

SCENE EIGHT - PRIVATE MENTOR NOTE WITH MELISSA

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After the drills, Melissa pulls Lena aside for a short sit-down while the others cool off.

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "You know what your problem is?"

LENA LUX: "Too many of them?"

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "You think honesty means shrinking. It doesn't. The version of you that answered Roxie the second time? That's somebody I'd keep listening to."

LENA LUX: "I just don't want to sound fake."

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "Then stop trying to sound like somebody who's already made it. Sound like the woman who is sick of not being taken seriously."

Lena absorbs that like it changes something.

SCENE NINE - FINAL EVALUATION

All eight recruits stand in the ring. Scott Stevens and Melissa Cartwright stand opposite them.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Today was better. It had to be."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Some of you found your voice. Some of you found pieces of it. Some of you are still describing yourselves like a scouting report."

MELISSA CARTWRIGHT: "The best moments today came when you stopped trying to sound like wrestlers and started sounding like yourselves under pressure."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Top three today."

He lets it hang.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Darren Valiant."

Darren nods once. Two strong weeks in a row.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Roxie Raze."

Roxie smirks, though not as hard as before. She knows she earned it.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Lena Lux."

The room reacts. Lena looks stunned. Boone actually glances over with respect. Jace smiles immediately.

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SCOTT STEVENS: "That's what growth looks like. You started the day scared. You did not finish it that way."

Lena's eyes well just a little, but she keeps it together.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Bottom three."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Silas Vale."

No surprise.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Malik Steele."

Malik nods, disappointed but steady.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Boone Mercer."

Boone's face hardens instantly.

SCOTT STEVENS: "Boone, truth is valuable. But if all you can do is resent what you're not, that resentment becomes your whole character. Fix it."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Silas, you're intelligent. That is not the same thing as compelling. Right now, you sound like a wall with opinions."

SCOTT STEVENS: "Malik, there is something in you. But you keep handing me outlines instead of a person."

SCOTT STEVENS: "No one is going home. But hear me carefully. Week three gets physical. Real physical. If you're still hiding -- behind polish, behind anger, behind distance, behind potential -- it's going to show."

SCENE TEN - HOUSE FALLOUT

Night in the house. Everyone is more tired, but also more honest now.

In the kitchen, Jace raises a protein shake toward Lena.

JACE VAN ARDENT: "Top three."

LENA LUX: "I know. I'm trying not to act weird about it."

JACE VAN ARDENT: "Act weird. You earned weird."

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Nearby, Roxie opens the fridge and glances over.

ROXIE RAZE: "Don't get comfortable, Cinderella."

LENA LUX: "Wasn't planning on it."

Roxie gives the tiniest approving nod and shuts the fridge.

In the living room, Boone sits alone until Tatum steps in.

TATUM QUINN: "You're making him too important."

BOONE MERCER: "Who?"

TATUM QUINN: "Darren."

BOONE MERCER: "He ain't important to me."

TATUM QUINN: "Then stop talking like every answer you give is really about him."

That one lands harder than Boone wants to admit.

In the Malik/Silas room, Silas is sitting on the end of the bed, furious in the quietest way possible.

SILAS VALE: "A wall with opinions."

MALIK STEELE: "He wasn't wrong."

SILAS VALE: "You don't have to sound so grateful to be included in the criticism."

MALIK STEELE: "I'm not grateful. I'm listening."

Silas looks away. He hates that.

In Darren and Tatum's room, Darren is stretching while Tatum writes in her notebook.

DARREN VALIANT: "You going to tell me I'm overperforming again?"

TATUM QUINN: "No. I'm going to tell you it's working."

DARREN VALIANT: "That almost sounded nice."

TATUM QUINN: "Don't get used to it."

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FINAL CONFESSIONALS

DARREN VALIANT: "Two weeks in, two top-three finishes. I'm not saying that makes me the favorite. I'm saying if people aren't already thinking it, they're behind."

JACE VAN ARDENT: "Today taught me something. Easy only gets you in the room. After that, you better have more."

ROXIE RAZE: "Lena finally showed a little life. Adorable. Also inconvenient."

BOONE MERCER: "Bottom three burns. Good. Maybe I need it to."

SILAS VALE: "If they want emotion, I can give them emotion. They may not enjoy the version I choose."

LENA LUX: "I needed today. Badly. Because now I know there is a version of me in here that doesn't ask to be believed. She just speaks."

MALIK STEELE: "I'm close. I know I am. I just need the words to catch up to what's already there."

TATUM QUINN: "This house is shifting. You can feel it. People are starting to stop pretending they're okay."

EPISODE TAG / NEXT WEEK

Quick flashes from Episode 3.

Boot camp ropes. Sled pushes. Flat-back bumps. Somebody vomiting into a trash can. Boone roaring through a conditioning drill. Jace clutching his ribs. Lena forcing herself back up. Scott Stevens shouting over the noise.

SCOTT STEVENS (V.O.): "Talking is over. Pain tells the truth faster."

ON SCREEN: NEXT WEEK -- "PAIN IS PART OF IT"

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Show Credits

Match: "Episode 2: "Say It So They Feel It"" - Written by Ben.

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