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# “I’M MISUNDERSTOOD

**RASHAD EVANS** SETS THE RECORD STRAIGHT ON WHO HE REALLY IS—AND WHAT HE THINKS ABOUT **JON JONES**

By **Anthony Springer, Jr.**

“Every time I sit back and reflect, it’s always like a moment. I can’t believe I’m here right now.”

“Here” for Rashad Evans happens to be the Red Rock Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas for the Zuffa fighter summit. After a day of workshops on all things revolving around the business of fighting, Evans ends his day meeting with the press.

In a room of other notable fighters like Melvin Guillard, Anthony Johnson and Jorge Santiago, Evans is the most sought after man of the evening. He knocks out his interviews like the professional he is, never tiring of the questions—many of which he’s undoubtedly answered hundreds of times.

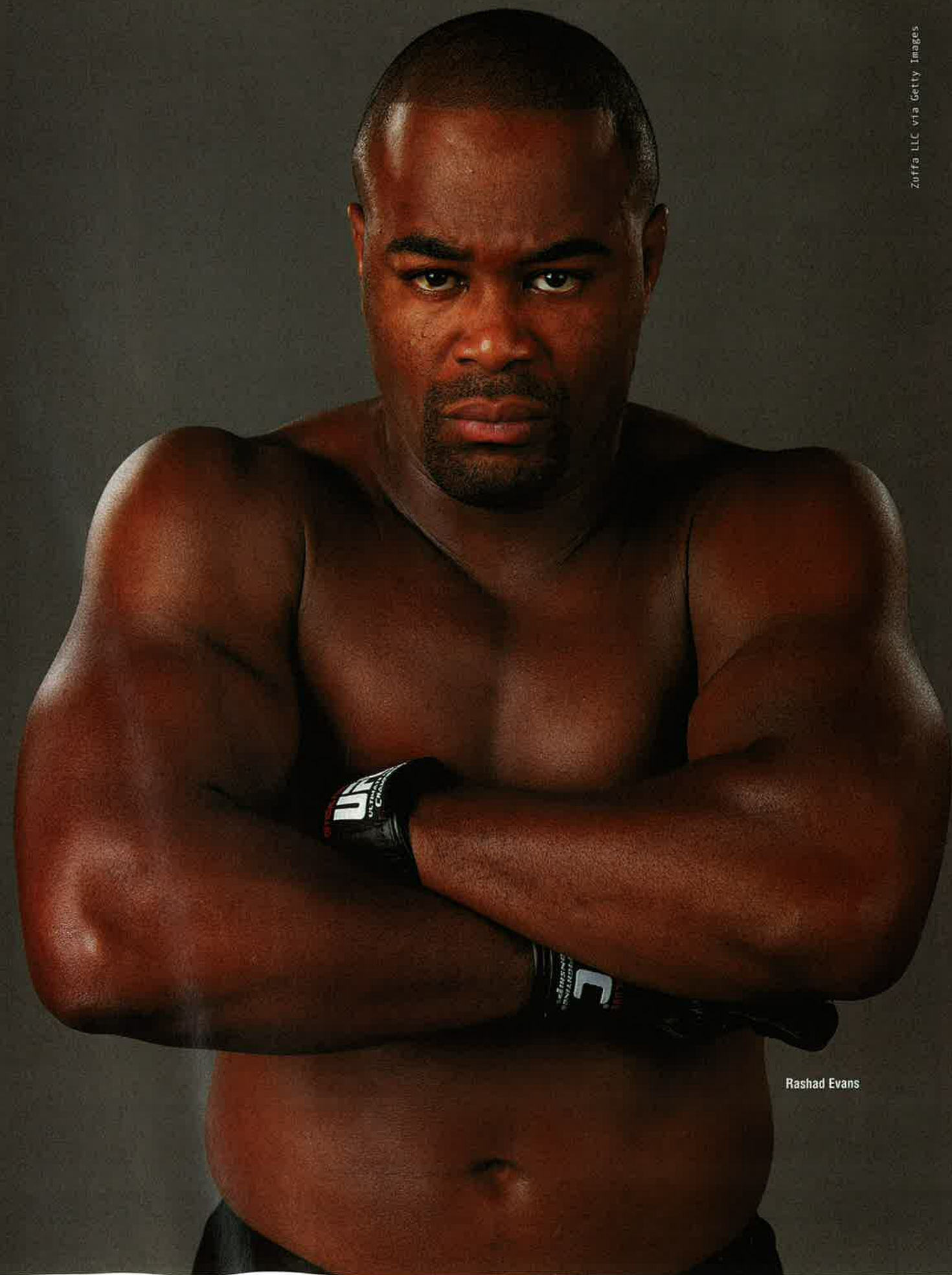
“Here” also happens to be his place in the current mixed martial arts landscape.

A perennial contender for the light-heavyweight crown, the Niagara Falls, New York native went from an undersized heavyweight on season two of “The Ultimate Fighter” to a top-five contender. Beating some of the world’s best took Evans around the country, fighting in some of the biggest venues. Winning—and winning often—also has perks outside of caged combat.

“A couple weeks ago, I was training at [pro football’s] Ray Lewis’ house,” he continues against the nighttime backdrop in Sin City. “I used to watch him play football, and now I’m at his house. It’s so crazy how far I’ve come. When I start thinking like that, I’m so grateful.”

*Sometimes I do give people some things to say. In the Forrest [Griffin] fight, when I did the nut gesture—yeah, that was kinda cocky.”*

— **Rashad Evans**



Rashad Evans



Former teammates Jon Jones (left) and former champion Rashad Evans shake hands after Jones' victory over Mauricio "Shogun" Rua at UFC 128.

## FAN PERCEPTION

Some may also say it's a bit crazy how fans react to him.

If you never met Rashad Evans and went solely on reactions to him from fans on the Internet, you'd think he was the worst person in the world. "Cocky" is an adjective frequently hurled in his direction.

But, heels in sports entertainment are seldom hated when the lights go down. With MMA, however, the perceptions linger long after the crew tears down the Octagon and everyone goes home. Evans is well aware of this.

"I'm definitely misunderstood," he laments. "As long as I've been fighting, I feel like the fans don't really know who I am. It's alright to an extent, but I'm so far from the idea of who they think I am, it bothers me."

The Michigan State grad was labeled early in his career. During his stint on season two's "The Ultimate Fighter," Matt Hughes blasted Evans after a fight for "showboating." Evans went on to win the competition, but he believes the infamous moment continues to hover over his career.

"There's been a big misconception since that point," he says. "Once you get a label on

you, it's hard to get that off. Sometimes, people are lazy with their perceptions. Once you get that [label], people won't look outside of that."

Of course, Evans acknowledges that he's far from a victim.

"Sometimes I do give people some things to say," he notes. "In the Forrest [Griffin] fight, when I did the nut gesture—yeah, that was kinda cocky."

The closest Evans came to fan favorite status was his appearance as a coach on "The Ultimate Fighter" season 10. Alongside bitter rival, Quinton "Rampage" Jackson, Evans came off as a thoughtful and caring coach, which was a stark contrast to Jackson.

The reality show served as a backdrop for an anticipated December 2009 Rampage-Evans showdown that was delayed when Jackson ventured off to film "The A-Team." Evans emerged a fan favorite, but he became the villain—again—as the May 2010 fight drew closer.

"I thought I came off pretty well and gave people an idea of who I really was," he says. "Then the delay of the fight [happened], and it seemed like people completely forgot and they became 'Rampage' fans again."

Evans dominated Jackson en route to a unanimous decision victory. The run up to the bout was epic in terms of trash talk; something the Spartan says fueled his desire to win.

"I knew I couldn't lose," says Evans. "If I lose to this dude, there's no way I'll ever hear the end of it."

He'd like to fight Jackson again—and finish in a more dominating fashion.

"I let him off the hook so much," he says. "I should've finished him. Because he wanted to be finished. He had that look in his eyes like he didn't want to be in there."

## 15-1-1

With a 15-1-1 record, Evans has finished off a slew of opponents, including a who's who of the division. Two of those wins came against former UFC poster boys—which certainly didn't go over well with fans who watched their heroes fall by Evans' hand.

In 2008, Evans knocked out Chuck Liddell with an overhand right. He closed out that year by finishing the original Ultimate Fighter, Forrest Griffin. Now, he's on a collision course with the UFC's new fan favorite and former teammate, Jon "Bones" Jones.

It was never supposed to be like this.

## WAR OF WORDS

As members of Jackson's MMA, Evans and Jones spoke highly of each other in the press. That is, until Jones stated he would fight Evans if the two were "forced" to do so by the UFC.

Evans says Jones violated the Team Jackson's pact that teammates shouldn't fight. Jones' statement opened a wound that remains raw to this day. A conversation between the pair shortly after the March 2010 interview did nothing to quell the brewing conflict.

"I talked to him after he made that comment, about a week later," Evans recalls. "Jon is hella immature. If I made a comment like that on recorded TV, the first thing I'm going to do is call. Don't go back on the agreement that we had not to fight each other."

An injury to Jones' hand halted a planned August meeting but did little to quell the beef between the two.

"Jon Jones is fake, I don't like him," Evans says when asked if anything has changed now that the Jones fight is off for now.

In addition to violating the pact, Evans was also perturbed when Jones stated he could have finished Evans during practice, a claim the eventual challenger flatly disputes.

"That's what you really think? I'm in camp helping you get in shape, helping you get ready for Ryan Bader. Trying to give you a look, what kind of teammate is that?"

Evans and Jones will eventually lock horns—the only question is when and where.

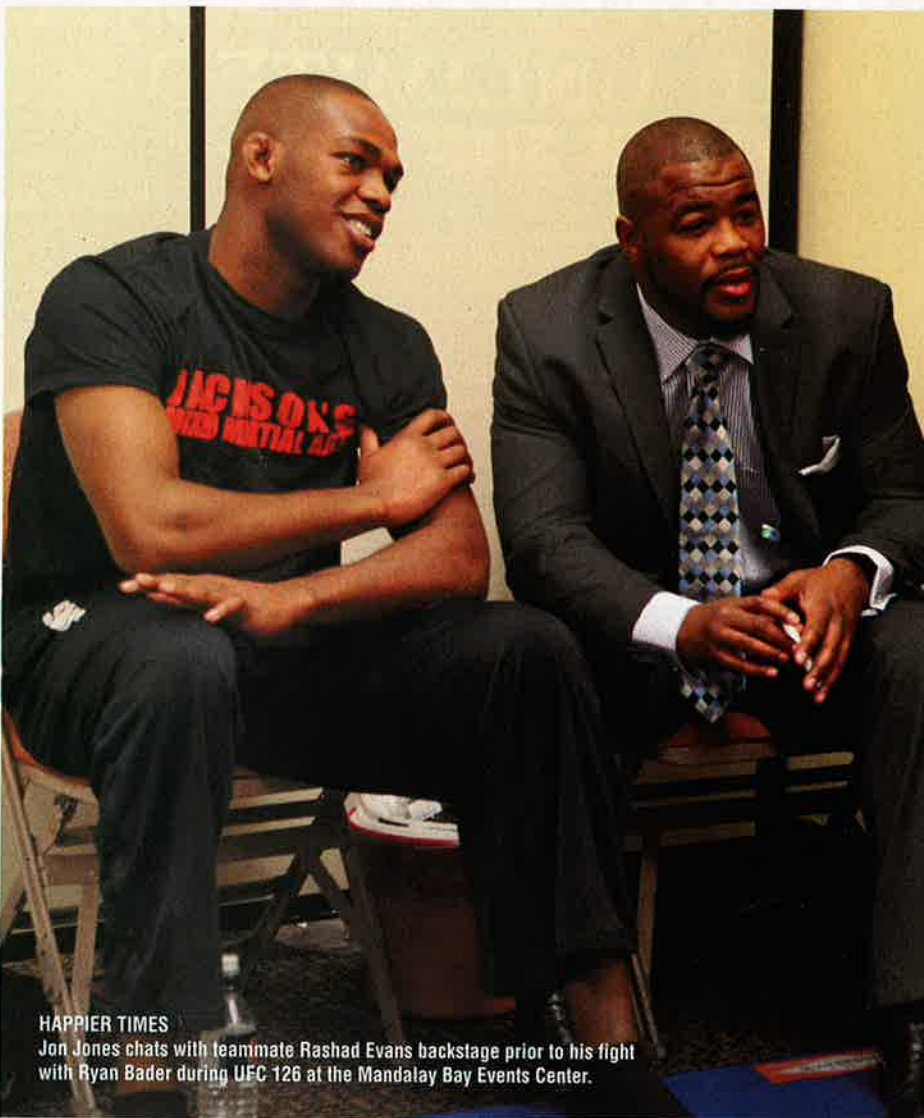
## DAVIS COMES FIRST

For now, the former light-heavyweight champion and TUF winner is focused on a UFC 133 headlining bout against rising star Phil Davis. With the press and fans focused on the more dramatic rivalry with the champion, Evans knows he can't even think about Jones unless he gets by Davis.

"It's going to be a good fight," he predicts. "I've got a lot of respect for [Phil Davis]. It's going to be some good times."

And if he gets that "W," he'll sit back and reflect, thinking about that bout with Jones.

*The Writer: Anthony Springer, Jr. is an avid MMA fan and frequent contributor. He is a founding member and editor at TheWellVersed.com. He lives in the Fight Capital of the World, Las Vegas, Nevada.*



### HAPPIER TIMES

Jon Jones chats with teammate Rashad Evans backstage prior to his fight with Ryan Bader during UFC 126 at the Mandalay Bay Events Center.

*I should've finished him. Because he wanted to be finished. He had that look in his eyes like he didn't want to be in there."*

— *Rashad Evans,*  
talking about Rampage

## Evans Unplugged

### ON GOING UNDEFEATED

"Everybody always told me a loss would happen. It was a reality I didn't want to accept. I accepted it. When it happened, I was wondering, 'Is this what it feels like?'"

### ON HIS TUF EXCHANGES WITH RAMPAGE

"It was real. A lot of stuff they didn't even show because we just got into it. It was on sight. He couldn't even say a couple words. Every time he'd say something, it'd be on."

### ON TALKING TO THE MEDIA

"This is how people get to know me. The only way they can get to know me is the interview. From that, they put together an idea of who I am. Sometimes they can make you look good, sometimes they can make you look bad as hell."

MMA