

The Jones boy: UFC's 'Bones' Jones on Vitor Belfort, beating Rampage and the Aussie accent

By Michael Winkler

Jon Jones has received more hate over the past month than any sportsperson other than Lance Armstrong. His crime? Refusing to fight an unexpected and unworthy opponent on very short notice, thus spelling the end of UFC151. The consequence has been a vast vomiting of hate, particularly from internet cowards and twitter trolls, but also from other fighters. Most notably, he has been slammed by UFC boss Dana White who, amongst other criticisms, said Jones was talking like "a male supermodel".

So when Bigpond Sport gets to speak to Jones, we are ready for a prima donna act. Sure, the bloke is the best fighter on the planet, but obviously we had his personality wrong, and he must be the biggest prat on the planet too.

Well – apologies to the bitter legion of Jones haters, but we bear bad news: the man could charm a starving crocodile from a roast chicken. He is flawlessly polite, generous with his time, and presents as the easy-going gent we always thought he was.

So Jon, you've had a month of being called every name under the sun, so you must be a bit snarly? "I feel great, getting ready to compete against one of the greatest fighters in the world," he says. "I am so blessed to have such a phenomenal job. My family's happy, my wife's happy, my kids are happy, healthy, beautiful, at school. We're going well."

Fair enough, but you must be churned up by the hatemongers and the ongoing imbroglio with White, Chael Sonnen and half the UFC? "I'm really over the whole situation. I've got a lot to be grateful for. I'm full speed ahead for UFC 152."

The legendary Frank Shamrock has called Dana White "a bully" over the way he has spoken publicly about you recently. "Yeah, I read that. That's Frank's opinion." He's not buying in. He's moving on.

At UFC 152 on 22 September Jones will put his light-heavyweight title on the line against Vitor Belfort. The veteran Brazilian has been an MMA fighter since 1996 and has wins over foundation era big men Wanderlei Silva, Tank Abbott, Heath Herring and Randy Couture. He is a decade older than the 25-year-old Bones.

"Fighting Vitor is a huge honour for me," Jones tells BigPond Sport. "I'm a young kid who has grown up in an awesome sport with a lot of history. Vito Belfort is part of that history, and to be given the opportunity to associate with that history by possibly beating him is a great challenge and an honour. I'm honoured to compete against Vitor. I respect him, everyone respects him – new school fans, old school fans.

"(Despite the controversy it has been) not at all hard to focus. I have nothing to complain about in that regard. All the drama is so small when it comes to the grand scheme of things, all the things going on in the world. I have a lot to be grateful for.

“I know why I’m here. I’m not here to be the most popular person necessarily, I’m here to be a dominant champion, Keep my eyes on the prize. Train. My training is going well, my cardio is extremely high, my strength fitness is high, and I’m ready to go out there and compete and go really well.”

In our opinion Jones is the best fighter in the world. Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao had claims in the past, but both are past their prime. Georges St. Pierre is still recovering from injury. Anderson Silva has been a worthy holder of the title – but he has been surpassed by an MMA practitioner with more lethal weapons and an even more irresistible style.

Bones grew up in a town in north-east USA called Endicott. It only has 13,000 people but is something of a hothouse, producing polemicist Camille Paglia, humorists David and Amy Sedaris, *The Twilight Zone* creator Rod Serling, four-time baseball All-Star Johnny Logan, and Johnny Hart who drew the *BC* and *Wizard of Id* comic strips.

It also fostered the Jones boys. Older brother Arthur is a defensive end for the Baltimore Ravens. Younger brother Chandler is a defensive end for the New England Patriots. Middle-brother Jon is the youngest-ever UFC champion and the first MMA fighter to sign a Nike global contract. He has been called the new Muhammad Ali for his speed, dominance and sport-transcending charisma.

Jones’ record is conspicuously free of bums. His second UFC fight was against Stephan Bonner, and since then he has faced men like Brandon Vera, Ryan Bader, Lyoto Machida, Mauricio Rua, ‘Rampage’ Jackson and Rashad Evans. His only loss was in 2009 when he destroyed Matt Hamill but was disqualified for the use of forbidden downwards elbow strikes.

We put it to Bones that the devastation he wreaked on Bader was his most complete performance, utterly demoralising the then-unbeaten strong man before finishing the fight with a choke. He counters that his favourite fight was his rear naked choke triumph over Jackson almost exactly one year ago. “Rampage was a consummate athlete, phenomenal punching power in both hands, very difficult, very experienced, so to be able to finish him when he had never been finished by submission in his whole career was extremely gratifying for me,” he says.

The decision by Silva to fight Bonnar at light-heavyweight at UFC153 makes a future Jones-Silva ‘super fight’ increasingly possible. Jones has also suggested that he might move to heavyweight in a couple of years. But first there is Belfort to take care of in Toronto, after which time he can think about other things – such as visiting Australia.

“There is a fighter called Kyle Noke who is here at Greg Jackson’s (gym) and we’ve developed a really close relationship. I could see myself sometime in the future hanging out with him in Australia. I love the way you guys sound – you’ve got the best accents.”

One of the things the haters like to throw at Jones is that he is “fake”, an exceptionally hard criticism to disprove. Personally we prefer to take people at face value. In our opinion Jones was harshly treated after the UFC 151 meltdown, and the criticism he

cops borders on the hysterical. We've always thought he is a classy guy, and we're sticking by that opinion until there's any decent evidence to the contrary.

So, how does the most dominant fighter on planet earth finish the interview with a person he's never heard of on the other side of the globe? Is it arrogance personified, more high-handedness from the crown prince of self-obsession?

"Thank you for your interest in doing the story," he says. "That's pretty cool."

Sorry, haters.

*Originally published on BigPond Sport, 15 September 2012*