

Jon Huertas:

Mixed Martial Artist,
Special Forces Operative
and Star of
ABC's *Castle*

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TAPOUT: We are at Werdum's MMA Gym in Venice, CA. What's been going down in here today?

JON: I am training with my coach Marcus Kowal, and I like to use a lot of my training on our show *Castle* on ABC. The writers let me work in a lot of that stuff. I like to keep training and keep my technique sharp. I am mainly a boxer, or Jeet Kune Do style guy, but I have been into MMA since 1993. I

don't have much of a wrestling background, so Marcus is helping me. I just want to be more rounded, and Marcus is great with wrestling. I think mixed martial arts simulates hand-to-hand combat, and I need that type of knowledge for the show. I'd love to one day have a fight, maybe before I turn 45. (laughs) I'd like to fight Joe Rogan actually.

TAPOUT: Joe Rogan can scrap. He is no joke!

JON: Oh I know! I have heard. But I am a striker and I have heavy hands. I am sure if he gets me to the ground, he would probably dominate. I just want to keep working though. I am working with Lucas Perez here at Werdum's and he seems to think I have a pretty good base. I have done a lot of jiu-jitsu as well. Jeet Kune Do utilizes a lot of jiu-jitsu techniques. We'll see if Joe is up for the challenge.



TAPOUT: Well, we will see if we can line something up.

JON: (Laughs) Cool! I'd love it. I figure, he's an entertainer ... I'm an entertainer. No one will get hurt. (laughs)

TAPOUT: How do you get to incorporate mixed martial arts into your character on the show?

JON: Well, sometimes we may have to go question a guy and he might not be the guy we are looking for. He may not be the killer or the murderer, but they are bad guys. They have usually done something wrong and they like to fight their way out. Then you've got to take them down. On episodes 22 and 24, I will get to use a LOT more MMA ... ESPECIALLY on the season finale! My character is kind of the tough guy, and I have a partner who is more the smart guy. You need some information — he's the encyclopedia; I am the bat!

TAPOUT: What was it about fighting that got your attention? What got you interested?

JON: Well, when I was in the military, it was part of our training to learn hand-to-hand combat. I took some Jeet Kune Do seminars with Dan Inosanto. The goal was of course to be brutal, and to get in and out of a fight quickly. Having been in the military, to brutally disable an opponent was a part of my life. I was stationed in the

South where there was a lot of tough man competitions, and I would go to those. It was a lot of fun. I mean I love boxing, but with the UFC, PRIDE FC and Strikeforce, there's nothing like it. The sportsmanship is amazing too. One minute you are trying to knock each other's head off and the next you are hugging saying, "Man that was great! Great fight!"

TAPOUT: How does it feel for you personally to be able to work in so much MMA into your character?

JON: It's great collaborating with everyone and especially the writers. The creator of the show actually let us have some freedom which allowed me to work in my Special Forces background into my character's backstory.

TAPOUT: Tell us a little about your military background.

JON: I spent eight years in the Air Force studying advanced nuclear weapons. I ended up cross-training into Special Operations for many years. The military made me the man I am today. The military takes kids who are 18 years old and it teaches them about responsibility and respect. That's what my military experience gave me. They are qualities I have with me now, and I utilize them as an actor. You learn a "never quit" mentality, and in the entertainment business, a lot of doors get closed in your face. The military gave me enough

heart to keep going on. It was tough at times, and I was definitely in some tough situations, but I learned to stay strong.

TAPOUT: Did you ever find yourself in any hand-to-hand combat?

JON: No, modern day warfare is quite different than it used to be. But I occasionally had to use my training in some military town bar fights. (laughs) Guys would pick fights with guys that were in the military. I don't like to fight though; I like to compete. In the bar fights, we'd have to end the fights quickly for safety. Then we'd buy the guy a pitcher afterward. (laughs) Clean that blood off of you! Get this guy a pitcher man!

TAPOUT: Tell us a little about the organization you are involved with, Puppies Behind Bars, and the Dog Tag program for veterans.

JON: Puppies Behind Bars is a non-profit organization that takes Labrador Retrievers and Yellow Labs, and we train them behind bars. There are several different prisons in New York and the New Jersey area that we use. We place the puppies, once they are 6-8 weeks old, into an inmate's care. That puppy lives with that inmate 24/7 and they get the BEST training any dog could get! These inmates train these dogs from the time they wake up in the morning until the time they go to sleep. Our



puppiesbehindbars.com

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inmates are even trained by some of the best dog trainers in the world. Once these dogs reach 18 months old, the inmate then gives the dog to a wounded veteran that is suffering from PTSD, traumatic brain injury, or physical injury. What the puppy does from the time of its birth, it rehabilitates human beings. First the inmate ... and then the veteran. The inmates are now given a chance to give back to society, and the veteran has a tool to help them function in society. These inmates are so proud to give these animals that they have spent over a year of their lives training. It really is an emotional and beautiful event.

TAPOUT: Does Puppies Behind Bars cover all of the costs for the animal?

JON: There is no cost to the inmate or the wounded veteran; Puppies Behind Bars has been around for a long time. We had a bomb-detecting program initially. In fact, it was one of our dogs that found the recent bomb in Time Square.

TAPOUT: How can a veteran be selected to qualify for this program?

JON: A veteran simply has to prove that he has been diagnosed with PTSD, or has sustained injury in the line of duty. We screen each veteran to make sure that they are a good candidate. We have to make sure they can

handle the demands of caring for the dog, because they have to maintain the dog's training. They have to keep them functioning like a service dog. They can always apply for the Dog Tags program on our website: puppiesbehindbars.com.

TAPOUT: How can an inmate apply?

JON: The inmates are selected through the prison's administration. The inmate can apply with them and a lot of times there is a waiting list. They are also screened and interviewed, and we make sure they have the patience.

TAPOUT: Are you a dog lover yourself?

JON: I am a dog lover! I have two dogs, and I will always have dogs. Dogs are great for healing veterans, and they have a healing quality for anybody. If you are single, they can cure loneliness. They give a love that is unconditional, and it is unlike any other from human beings. It's built in their instincts, and they see us as their pack!

TAPOUT: Being a military man yourself, what do you think of the Dog Tag program?

JON: I think it is amazing! Again, I am a dog lover and I have seen what they do for me. When I got out of the military and I moved to California to be an actor, I didn't

have anybody ... just my dogs. I didn't know anybody and I would have been stressing out if I didn't have my dogs. I just want to raise awareness and get the word out to wounded veterans that this program exists. It's one of the best programs and that's why I got involved.

TAPOUT: What is your favorite story of a vet that received one of your dogs?

JON: One guy was suffering from PTSD and he got deep into alcohol. He had plans to go to school once he left the military, but he got involved in alcohol and drugs. He was in trouble. Once he got his dog, it changed his life completely. He is on his way to becoming a psychologist now. He chose a career in mental health BECAUSE OF THE DOG! He saw what the dog did for him. He was going nowhere, then got one off our dogs. Now he will be working in the mental health industry. It was amazing.

TAPOUT: Any advice to anyone dealing with PTSD, or for the ones who are having a hard time adjusting to life after war?

JON: Advice? Just seek help. When I was in the military, soldiers had a sense that we had to be tough. They have to be tough at all times. But a true warrior knows when he needs help. Know when you need help. There are so many programs out there. You are a soldier, adapt and overcome.