



Artest Readies Release of Rap Album

Kings Star Ron Artest Looks for Respect Off Court As He Readies Release of Rap Album

By JONATHAN LANDRUM

The Associated Press

ATLANTA - Ron Artest sat backstage with his entourage, wondering if the audience would approve of his upcoming performance.

He was prepared for extra scrutiny after being tarnished by his unpredictable, out-of-control behavior over the past few years in the NBA. And he knows that many already have stereotyped him as another athlete-turned-rapper such as Allen Iverson and Kobe Bryant, who didn't excel in the music industry.

Still, Artest believes he can prove the doubters wrong.

"I've got music to be heard," he said. "Obviously, some people will judge me from my past. But I can make music. I want everyone to know about my life and relate to me, and see that I'm very approachable and easygoing."

Artest is striving to gain more respect in hip-hop and give many a better understanding of himself on his new album, "My World," which will be released Oct. 31. He raps about his personal experiences, world issues and partying in clubs, while also expressing his thoughts about participating in one of the worst brawls in U.S. sports history.

"When people actually listen to the album, they'll say to themselves, 'Wow, I didn't know that he felt this way,'" Artest said. "It's like I'm a totally different person on this album."

Character issues have hurt Artest's image around the NBA, but his bad-boy image might help in an industry that thrives on thuggish demeanor, a la 50 Cent and other roguish rappers. Growing up in a broken home and dealing drugs at a young age in New York City's Queensbridge section, a neighborhood where drugs and gun violence are common, also might help him gain acceptance in the studio.

"People don't understand that my street credibility is a whole lot bigger than most in the industry today," Artest said. "If I had more push, then everyone will see the results."

His recent tours may help. This year, he performed during the popular Hot 97 Summer Jam festival in New York, opened for rapper Fat Joe on a European tour, and was the beginning act for platinum-plus selling artists Ludacris and Young Jeezy.

"Ron's a hustling-type guy," Jeezy said. "He jumped on the road with me and went after his dreams. I've seen him go out on numerous shows and do his thing. When his album drops, I'm going to pick it up."

While Artest is trying to find his way as a rapper, others have given him moral support.

"This is what he is supposed to do," said producer Rodney Jerkins. "It's all about the hustle and the grind. I don't believe in letting things drop in your lap. You've got to make it happen and artists like him need to hit it hard."

DJ Drama said the athlete-turned-rapper deserves a chance. He expects Artest to receive some negative feedback, but pointed out that Shaquille O'Neal had a short but successful tenure as an artist in spite of negative reviews. Even though Drama has never heard a single track from Artest, the disk jockey said he should still get a chance.

"If he puts his mind to it, he could do it well," Drama said. "He just has to study the game. The same way he learn how to play basketball, he can do the same way with rap. I know Ron Artest and he's a passionate dude. I know he has something to say."

Artest does have a riveting tale. In 2004, he was benched two games after asking Indiana Pacers coach Rick Carlisle for a month off to rest from a busy schedule, which included promotional appearances for his R&B group Allure, a trio signed under his label Tru Warier Records.

Two weeks later, after being benched, Artest charged into the stands toward a Detroit fan, claiming he was hit in the face with a cup of ice, and exchanged punches with other fans. He was suspended for 73 regular-season games and the playoffs.

During his time off, Artest continued to work out while promoting Allure's album. But last year, he was traded from Indiana to the Sacramento Kings, the group's album "Chapter III" was a failure and major record labels weren't showing any interest in him.

"It was tough," he said. "No one wanted to give me or my group a chance. When I wrote my rhymes, people dissed me. They still do it to me 'til this day."

Artest said his competitive nature won't let him quit on the court or off.

"Right now, I'm playing hard but not smart," he said. "At times, the industry hasn't embraced me for who I am in a business sense. But I'm just going to keep going. If I lose, then I lose. But I'm trying to win."

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