

## Online Exclusives



### Ron Artest: To The Beat of His Own Drum

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Let's face it, most hip hop fans do not want to hear athletes rap. They want to see them stay in their lane - glide through the air and dunk, bust out a touchdown, run and hit the long ball - anything, but get in the booth and pick up a microphone.

What **Sacramento Kings** forward **Ron Artest**, who's notoriously known for dancing to the beat of his own drum - on and off the court - hopes to do is change the public's perception of ballers rhyiming. In fact, Artest, whose debut solo rap album is slated for an Oct. 24 release, hopes hip hop fans will lend him their ears.

"I think a lot of people could see me lyrically because I'm not like a lyricist," explains Artest, "but you know, my flow has got a hundred times better and the topics and the concepts of the songs have gotten better too.

"It's not about being a rapper. It's about doing good music. I just want people to be interested in my music and just expect something different. I'm just a different artist."

As a product of the same Queensbridge hood that bred hip hop icons like **Mobb Deep** and **Nas**, Artest is no stranger to hip hop. In fact during one of the most heated and intense times in New York City hip hop history, he became the center of a certain controversy right in his own hood. During Nas and **Jay-Z's** legendary battle, Artest frequently showed up boldly wearing Hov's *Rocawear* gear in QB.

"I'm from Queensbridge and I rep my hood to the fullest, but Jay-Z is cool with me," explains Artest. "Like, when I went to *St. Johns* (University), I had *Rocawear* on in Queensbridge and it was a lot of controversy behind that. I was wearing Jay-Z's *Rocawear* because Jay-Z was the only one showing love at that time so, I was shouting out. He was showing love to me, so, I showed love right back."

Despite that choice - and although Artest firmly believes that "Nas was put in a situation where he didn't have to sign with Jay-Z," - he has no ill will towards the **Braveheart** veteran. Artest still cites Nas' *Illmatic* and *Stillmatic* as two of his favorite albums of all time. He also still bumps Mobb Deep's *The Infamous* and *Hell On Earth*.

Artest has made the best of his offseason, as he recently opened up a show for **Young Jeezy**.

“Yeah, it wasn’t like Jeezy asked me to open up for him, but I happened to be on a couple of tours with him,” says Artest. “It was great because the crowd all came to see Jeezy and we got a chance to grab the opportunity and grab some fans. I mean it was just so crunk and so crazy. I was feeling them.”

Although Artest is seizing the opportunity to be away from the consistent rigors of an NBA season, he is conscious of the point that he may very well be a target of league officials, once the season starts. In addition to sparking an all-out brawl in Detroit, Artest was suspended this past season for one game during the NBA playoffs for a very questionable elbow that brushed the face of a **San Antonio Spurs** player.

“I think for most of my career I will be targeted because you got to think about how the NBA is making a lot of money right now,” says Artest. “I’m not like a **Tim Duncan**, or not whatever you call that ‘classy type dude.’ They don’t need people like me in the NBA. They don’t want people like me in the league, but I think if I keep doing right and just keep playing basketball, I’m going to be fine.”

Until the season starts, Artest has his hands full with his recording career. In addition to prepping his album, Artest has a few talented Queensbridge artists that he’s working with. He’s also producing and engineering.

So, whether win or lose, Artest plans on rhyming like he plays ball- hard and all out. “I’m from New York and I do my thing, I play hard and now I rap.”

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