

THE JOURNEYMAN

STOP TRYING TO BE AS SMOOTH AS DHANI JONES. YOU'LL NEVER BE

There are jocks, and there are thinkers, and never the twain shall meet—because if they did, it wouldn't leave much room for the rest of the male species to compete. And that's kinda how you feel after meeting Dhani Makalani Jones... Damn, even his name is cooler than yours! At 32, Dhani (pronounced dah-hah-nee, or, smoother than you'll ever be) has a résumé that reads like an 8-year-old's "what I want to be when I grow up" list (you know, before they get to be old enough to realize they probably won't be a doctor, race car driver and a fireman).

COOL, COOLER AND BOWTIES

Dhani is a 10-year, and counting, NFL football veteran, and not some special-teamer. He's the real deal: a linebacker with the Cincinnati Bengals. He's the one that gets paid to lay the timber and punish the guy with the pigskin. He's also got a clothing line that specializes in bowties. Ordinarily, a bowtie equals uncool (see *The Nutty Professor*) but check out his Five Star Ties line, and you'll see how Dhani manages to make an obscure accessory item from another era cooler than you thought possible, or at least cool-ish. And then, of course, Dhani has his Travel Channel show, *Dhani Tackles the Globe*, in which he jet-sets around the world trying sports from different cultures. Not reporting on, but playing them. Dhani is like the Mikey of professional sports around the world. He tries it and he likes it. And he lets the rest of us know what it feels like.

SHARING THE LOVE

He's engaging and charismatic. He's talented physically and intellectually. He's dapper even in a purple shirt and jeans. But the best part of everything he does is not that he does it, but that he's into sharing it. And that's why you can dig the guy, instead of wondering whether he deserves such a lot in life.

"The best thing I've ever heard about my show is that it allowed a viewer to see the human element present in other countries and in other sports. They say, 'It doesn't seem like a show. It's more like a story.' That it doesn't feel scripted. That it seems like I'm out there having a good time. And I am."

That sharing is evident on a personal level as well. What Dhani takes from the show is equally grounding—"the relationships," he says. He's bonded like only fellow athletes

can to Russian martial artists, rugby blokes, Kiwi sailors and all the other sportsmen he mixes it up with. And those relationships last long after the camera and crew disappear and the show moves on to another horizon. When he was in Miami during this year's Super Bowl, he reunited with a Spanish jai alai player who grew up in South Florida. And he has visits planned with many other of the athletes he's trained, broken bread and bled with.

JONESING FOR COMPETITION

Dhani totes the line between cocksure and down-to-earth enough to make you like him but also know not to mess with him. The allure of his show is that it opens a window to a self-aware athlete. And like all true athletes, Dhani thrives on competition. Whether he's learning muay Thai in Thailand, schwingen in Switzerland (traditional folk wrestling, the real kind) or smacking some quarterback upside the head, he engrosses himself in the sport and culture of competition. He sweats through it on the playing field like a combatant, not a sterile journalist. And most of the time he earns the respect of the athletes he competes against. "There is always the sizing-up component. One athlete walks into the realm of another—there's ego that goes into it, experience and a bunch of different competing forces. They ask themselves, 'Is he good, or he wasting my time?' It's a little dance. But when we get to it and that guard is dropped or lowered, we both realize that we are just competitors." **S**

DHANI TACKLES MIAMI

He's been around the globe; now check out what he likes in South Florida. With a passport as worn as Dhani's, you know the man understands good eating and great places to stay. And his Miami favorites don't disappoint. If he's craving a good steak, he'll make reservations at Prime 112. But if he's looking to get a fish fix, it's likely going to be Nobu and their renowned sushi. When he visited Miami for the Super Bowl, he stayed at the Mondrian South Beach, even though he admits he was skeptical at first. "I wanted to be right on the beach. But when I realized that the sun sets in the west and that the Mondrian faces that direction, as it overlooks Biscayne Bay, I changed my mind. It's also in a quieter part of Miami Beach that doesn't get bogged down in traffic."

"THE ESSENCE OF SPORT, ACROSS ALL BOUNDARIES, IS COMPETITION. ALL COMPETITORS ARE UNITED BY THE DESIRE TO COMPETE FOR SOMETHING THAT IS GREATER THAN THEMSELVES."

