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JAMES BRYDON

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Notes and quotes from fighters from the Great White North. In this week's Fight for the Troops edition: Hominick, Hague & Holst.

In this week's salute to the soldiers edition, we look at two guys fighting on Saturday's UFC Fight for the Troops 2 card as well as a former UFC fighter who has fought on a similar show before.

Hominick focused on Roop, not title shot

The whole country will be holding its collective breath Saturday night when Mark (The Machine) Hominick steps into the cage to fight former training partner [George Roop](#) at the Fort Hood military base in Killeen, Texas.

Well, at least those wanting to see a second Canadian compete in a championship bout in Toronto.

With a win, the Thamesford, Ont., native will get to challenge featherweight champion [Jose Aldo](#) at the Rogers Centre at UFC 129. With a loss, who knows when -- or if -- he'll ever get that chance at all, let alone in his home province.

How's that for pressure?

Hominick, 28, says he thrives on it.

"The added pressure is required," Hominick says. "If you're next in line for the title shot, you have to be able to handle the pressure. I think (UFC president) Dana White does that on purpose to some fighters to see if they're going to perform when they have to and I'm going to."

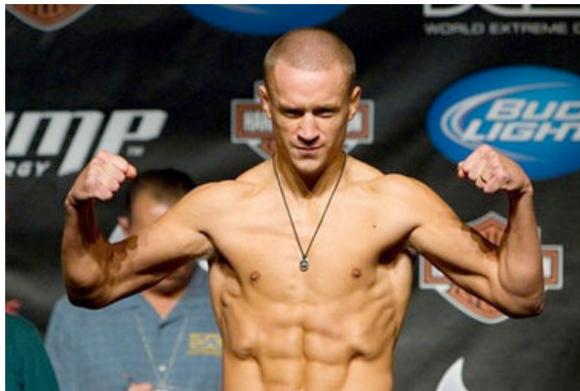
Hominick actually doesn't even want to think about what the future holds beyond Saturday.

"That's April 30th. I'm worried about January 22nd. (UFC 129) is going to be the biggest card of all-time, but I'm treating January 22nd like the biggest card of all-time right now."

Hominick, of course, is very familiar with Roop, as they used to train together under the Canadian's coach Shawn Tompkins. That means he knows his opponent's tendencies -- and the challenges he'll face when he squares off against him in a real capacity.

"His reach, he's very durable and he's very awkward; those three things present problems but we're ready for them," said Hominick, who is coming off surgery for his injured hand, which he says is now "100 per cent."

Hominick said he feels honoured to be part of the UFC's third show dedicated to the armed forces. Its previous "Fight for the Troops" event, Dec. 10, 2008 in Fayetteville, N.C., raised more than \$4 million for the [Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund](#), which supports the families of soldiers killed or severely injured while in



Mark (The Machine) Hominick.

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service. The Canadian broadcast of this Saturday's show (9 p.m. ET on Sportsnet) will also raise money for the [Canadian Hero Fund](#), for military personnel in this country and their families.

"It's obviously a great cause ... so to be a part of it is amazing, and I think the atmosphere is going to be pretty cool," Hominick said.

A couple of guys from his [Adrenaline MMA gym](#) in London, Ont., fought in a similar "Fight for the Troops" event under the Canadian promotion Wreck MMA. Alex Gasson and Jesse Gross travelled to the base in Kandahar, Afghanistan to compete at the show last Oct. 13 dedicated to the [Canadian Forces](#) -- both won their bouts.

"They said that the troops just responded so well. (The soldiers) just really appreciated the show and I think (Saturday's event) is going to be pretty neat."

(Also, the other current UFC fighter from Hominick's gym, [Sam Stout](#), was one of three Canadian fighters who joined Showdown Joe this week for a [visit to the Fort York Armoury](#), and some of those experiences will be part of Saturday's [Canadian broadcast](#).)

Hague gets another chance... again

Tim (The Thrashing Machine) Hague has done this "song and dance" before, or should I say "sign and fight" on a new UFC contract.

Twice joining MMA's premier organization only to be cut after a tough decision loss, the Edmonton native keeps proving to the UFC brass he deserves another kick at the can.

This time, after dropping a close decision to [Joey Beltran](#) at UFC 113 in Montreal in May, Hague swiftly went out to show what the UFC was missing. Two first-round knockouts over Zak Jensen and [Travis Wiuff](#) in his local Aggression MMA and he got a text from UFC VP of talent relations Joe Silva welcoming him back with a new four-fight deal.

As Hague prepares to take on [Matt Mitrione](#) Saturday, the 6-foot-4 heavyweight admits his cardio was his downfall in his last two UFC losses. Hague has since gone back to his strength and conditioning coach, [Shara Vigeant](#), who whipped him into shape.

"She took me to a level I didn't think I could achieve and I'm really excited to showcase what I can do in the cage," he said. "She focuses on really pushing the cardio and staying strong when you're tired, so (I did) a lot of five-minute circuits with all sorts of different exercises ... free weights, a lot of body weight stuff and lifting heavy bags, dead lifts, stuff like that. Strength and power is the main focus and muscular endurance."

Hague said when he first started back with Vigeant he was doing one- or two-minute rounds on an apparatus called [the Versaclimber](#) but he's now worked up to five five-minute rounds and says he feels great.

He's also ecstatic about appearing on a "Fight for the Troops" card and he'll be displaying that on his gear. A friend of his got in touch with Wayne Johnston, the founder of [Wounded Warriors](#) -- a foundation that helps soldiers in Canada who have fallen victim to injury.

"I'm really proud and honoured to be wearing a Wounded Warriors patch," said the 27-year-old married father of one. "(The troops) keep us safe every day."

As for Mitrione, Hague expects a good challenge in trying to overcome Mitrione's athleticism but believes he's got the edge in the skill department.

"I've been doing this a little longer than him and I just have to stay calm in there and not get over excited if he tags me or something like that," Hague said. "I don't want to turn it into a brawl so much as I want to stay technical and hopefully take him out with good solid technique."

Holst set for one final MMA fight before hanging up the gloves

Ottawa native Mark (Boots) Holst has plenty of connections to the military, even at just 25 years old. The lightweight fighter competed at Wreck MMA's first "Fight for the Troops" event on Dec. 12, 2009 in Gatineau, Que., where he grew up.

"Everybody came together for that cause, fighting for the (Canadian) troops," said Holst, who added his best friend is part of the "Van Dooos" -- [the Royal 22nd Regiment in Valcartier, Que.](#)

"He's done several trips in Afghanistan," said Holst, a teacher at [Ottawa Academy of Martial arts](#), where a lot of the students are in the army.

"Those are the guys that I train with and teach almost every day and obviously sometimes they're gone overseas, but they always come back and I get to teach and talk (with) them. I have a lot of friends and a lot of people that I know who are in the army, so it meant a great deal for me that event."

While Holst competed at 170 pounds for the fight, his rear-naked choke of Nabil Khatib was the second of three straight wins that earned him a shot at the UFC.

Unfortunately he dropped both of his fights in the Octagon, one by decision and one by submission last October, and was released. Still, Holst, who competed in many jiu-jitsu tournaments all over the U.S. before turning pro in MMA in 2006, has no regrets.

"Obviously it was a big disappointment I did not get to win in both my fights but nonetheless it was a great experience," Holst said. "And it was a great learning experience for me. Now I have to go back to the drawing board and work on my weaknesses and work on my holes and get back at it."

His next opportunity to see how much he has improved his mixed martial arts game will be at home against Markhaile (Showtime) Wedderburn on Jan. 28 at [Wreck MMA: Strong and Proud](#) at the Casino Lac-Leamy.

It will also be his last. Holst announced over the weekend [he's retiring from professional MMA](#) following the fight.

Holst, who has been competing in martial arts since he was 15, says there is a lot more he wants to do in the sport than just compete professionally and he prefers to focus his energy on one thing at a time.

"I want to get back to just training martial arts for what I started doing, which was just for fun as a hobby," Holst admitted. "And I want to open a school and to do that you need a lot of time and a lot of dedication for it to be successful.

"It's been 10 years I've been competing in martial arts and cutting weight and training full-time; it takes a toll on the body. I want to enjoy my life a little bit more. There's different paths you can take in martial arts ... it's time to hang up the gloves and work on a different path."

Holst, who has always lived in the Hull/Gatineau area and whose first language is French, said he isn't concerned about potentially passing up the chance to compete in Ontario now that it's legalized.

"What I really love is to coach and to corner fighters. We have a lot of up-and-coming fighters and I want to share my experience with them and make them hopefully champions one day. If they fight on local shows, I'm sure I'll be living through them in the ring."

And if ever there were another chance to be involved in a "Fight for the Troops" show again, he said he would "jump on it." He couldn't make the Afghanistan trip in October but said his good friend and training partner Stephane Bernadel, who was a winner there, told him it was an awesome event.

"Maybe next time I could go and coach the guys there," Holst said. "Or maybe build a ring, or referee or do something."

Holst may be retiring from competition, but he intends to remain very much involved in the MMA scene. And the fighter will always have a special place in his mind for the brave men and women who risk not only their bodies but their lives every day.

As should we all.

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ABOUT



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James is a writer, editor and MMA enthusiast. His nickname, "Big Game" was given to him in the tradition of former Laker James Worthy and current Rays pitcher James Shields.

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