Before THE Bell

FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, *WWE MAGAZINE*'S CAMERAS CAPTURE THE SUPERSTARS AND DIVAS IN THEIR MOST INTIMATE BACKSTAGE MOMENTS AS THEY PREPARE FOR IN-RING COMBAT. IT'S GO TIME!

AS TOLD TO JOHN MIHALY & JEREMY BROWN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARIUS BUGGE

Before they step between the ropes, before their music hits or their names are announced, even before they set foot in front of the WWE Universe, every Superstar and Diva observes an intensely personal ritual. These unique backstage moments occurring around Gorilla Position set the mood for the talent to focus on their opponents for that particular evening. Inside, discover what these grapplers do to psyche themselves up—or stretch themselves out—before charging into battle. Some bend limbs and bodies to the limits of their pain thresholds; others pace the hallways with a palpable nervous energy. And some, like the enigmatic Sin Cara (to your right), draw mystical energy from their surroundings to get into the zone.

EVAN BOURNE

"Before a match, I have to loosen up and get warm. That means getting all my joints moving—my wrists and ankles, then my shoulders and legs. Then I start hopping around the way I do when I wrestle, and that's to coordinate all of the small muscle groups, such as the pro-receptor muscles in your ankles, as well as the stabilizers. That way I have everything firing together. My whole body is a connected system, but it's just sitting around all day. You're in the car, you're on a plane, you're sitting in a locker room, but your body is not completely connected; your fingers are not connected to your toes. So I have to get all my nerves firing and everything functioning at a high level, because I'm about to go into a very intense 15-minute sprint of physical violence."

CODY RHODES

"I do two things. First, I eat a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup, because someone told me Lex Luger used to do that to get the veins to come to his skin and look extremely vascular, which is kind of true because of the sugar content. Then I stand in Gorilla Position. Now, anyone who's been in Gorilla can attest to the fact that there are two people who are really obnoxious and loud in there. One, who I won't name, is on *Raw*; the other is me. All I do at that point is yell about what I'm about to do and how I'm going to do it. I make everyone uncomfortable while they're watching the monitors. It's like one of those vocal warm-ups, and that relaxes me enough so that I can be me."

THE MIZ

"I'm usually pacing around backstage. I'm constantly talking to myself, looking like a total lunatic. I'm in my own little bubble, my own little world. I don't want to talk to anybody. But if someone tries to talk to me, I don't freak out—I usually just say, 'Uh-huh, Uh-huh, Uh-huh,' and try to get them to go away. My mind is racing at 100 miles an hour. I can't even describe my game face. It's literally like I'm almost in panic mode. There's a sense of being scared and feeling fear, but once I enter the arena, it all goes away."

EVE

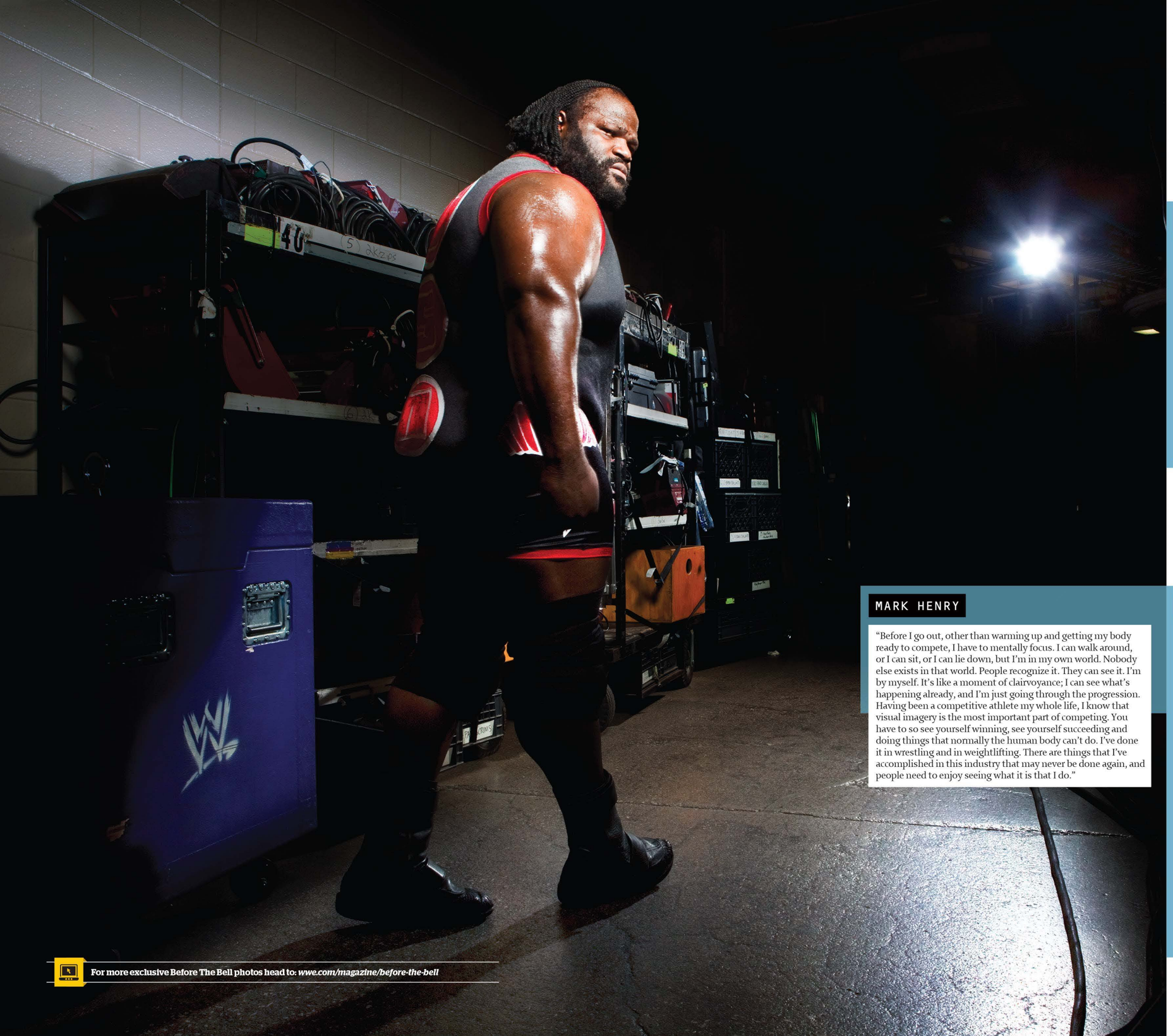
"Obviously, for safety reasons, we stretch because we're out there putting our bodies on the line. But another reason to stretch is that it increases the blood flow to the brain. It's good for me to do things that get the blood flowing, so I'm in top thinking mode. Getting in the ring isn't just a physical game—it's a mental game, too. Stretching is for the mind *and* body."

WILLIAM REGAL

"Bridging is a lost art. Wrestlers have been doing it for thousands of years, but in my opinion, the bridge is the best exercise for people of my profession to do. This is core training at its finest, from your neck all the way down to your tailbone. Chiropractors will tell you it's not good, but I challenge you to find one bit of evidence that it's bad for you. They say that it contracts your joints, but in fact, it does the opposite and opens them to the fullest. It's one of those things that fell out of fashion because people think it's too hard to do and they're scared to do it. I know these exercises saved me from greater injury. A word of caution, however—do *not* try this without having somebody show you how to do it properly first."

KOFI KINGSTON

"It's funny, I've never really thought about what's on my mind before I go out. I guess I'm trying to focus and get into the zone. I'm always trying to be better than I was the last time in the ring, so I kind of put that pressure on myself to go out there and steal the show. As night falls and the match time approaches, I start to get a little antsy. I want to step in the ring and get going. It's always that last half hour or 15 minutes that feel so much longer than they actually are. I guess it's just a habit, getting the nerves going—I know I'm about to head out and let myself go completely. It's just the ticking before the time bomb."



JUSTIN GABRIEL

"I get into gear about 20 minutes before I walk out from behind the curtain, but I don't do a lot of things. I sit down and I'm quiet for a while. That's if I can find a quiet area. Lately, I've been more serious. I'm just trying to get focused on what I'm going to do. I won't say I get angry, just serious. But I always stretch my legs and shoulders, and right before I come out, I also do a handstand and let the blood rush to my head. Then I do press-ups in that position."

MARK HENRY

"Before I go out, other than warming up and getting my body ready to compete, I have to mentally focus. I can walk around, or I can sit, or I can lie down, but I'm in my own world. Nobody else exists in that world. People recognize it. They can see it. I'm by myself. It's like a moment of clairvoyance; I can see what's happening already, and I'm just going through the progression. Having been a competitive athlete my whole life, I know that visual imagery is the most important part of competing. You have to so see yourself winning, see yourself succeeding and doing things that normally the human body can't do. I've done it in wrestling and in weightlifting. There are things that I've accomplished in this industry that may never be done again, and people need to enjoy seeing what it is that I do."

DAVID OTUNGA

"It's always the same. I'm usually thinking to myself—reminding myself—that I'm David Otunga. People ask, 'Are you nervous?' And I say, 'I'm David Otunga, and no one else is. When this is over, no matter what happens, I'm still going to be David Otunga and everybody else is still going back to their boring, miserable lives.' But I always have my cup of coffee in my hand. It's like brain juice for me. I'm not one of those guys who pumps up, because I feel that, at that point, you've either got it or you don't. No amount of last-second push-ups is going to make a difference. When I go through the curtain, and I see all of the people and I hear the roar—it's on. I'm a different person."

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