

FLOW STATE

Any Given Bars, San Jose's online hip hop interview show, returns with new season this Friday BY ETHAN GREGORY DODGE



COLD MORNING AIR fills Studio X Recording in southwest Oakland, as the film crew begins their setup. Over the next hour, the bustle fills the room with excitement. It's the start of a new season.

With the set now ready, Brandon Quintanilla, the show's producer, steps in front of the camera, clapperboard in hand. The flurry begins to calm. Quintanilla announces the take and clacks the board.

At that, the show's host, DJ

J.Wells, drops the show name. He makes large, sweeping gestures as he pronounces each word: Any Given Bars. He introduces today's rapper, DannyV, to his left, and the room fills with the thump of a massive hip hop beat. The artist closes his eyes and begins to spit a verse made just for that moment, perhaps completely improvised.

It's the first of nearly a dozen freestyles performed that day, the first of which will drop this Friday on YouTube, the start of the show's tenth season.

In the short span of two and half years, these video clips have become a

common sight in the Instagram feeds of Bay Area hip hop heads. But Wells and his co-host, South Bay hip hop mogul Young Monc, have their sights set on influencing the worldwide hip hop scene and consequently putting San Jose in what they believe to be its rightful place in hip hop history.

"When you hear San Jose the first thing that most people think about is Silicon Valley. We're so much more than just the tech world," Wells says. "They don't even think about all the rappers that we have here that are really popping. So I think it's up to us to shine that light on them."

The hosts' pride for their

hometown shines through in nearly every aspect of the show. Normally filmed at EMLN Exclusive in downtown San Jose, the usual backdrop portrays the SAP Center and oversized street signs bearing street names like Seven Trees Blvd and Monterey Rd.

"We need to highlight what's ours first," Monc says.

DIRTY SOUTH (BAY)

The Bay Area at large is known in the music industry as the birthplace of hyphy, a form of hip hop featuring playful lyrics and coarse, deep beats



Photo Credit: Karisma

OFF THE TOP Rico2Smoove (center) freestyles for *Any Given Bars* hosts J. Wells (left) and Young Monc (right) on episode 55.

feel like you're not stamped in the Bay Area unless you stop by *Any Given Bars*."

If local rappers' respect and preparation for the show is any indicator, they're well on their way to that goal.

"I trip out when people start spitting because you don't know how much they put into it until you hear them spin," Monc says. "It's an art. He really thought his shit out. That makes you proud."

Wells is also in awe at how seriously each artist takes advantage of the opportunity.

"I like seeing artists be nervous," Wells says. "To have somebody come into it and then value it that much they got butterflies in their stomach, that's dope to us. We created something that somebody gets nervous about, like a concert."

In the show's most viral clip, Oakland artist D-Lo drops an impressive barrage of bars over the beat from the Luniz's "I Got 5 On It." Quickly, Wells and Monc begin to bob their heads. Wells throws in the occasional hype—"What?" or "OK"—between lines. Smiles spread across the hosts' faces as the lyrics increase in speed and complexity. When the beat begins to fade, the viewer is only left wanting more.

From there, Wells and Monc engage in a simple, engaging interview. After a few questions, the interview seemingly finds a natural end and Quintanilla indicates that the rapper's segment is over. The group pose for a photo. Then, almost immediately, Wells and Monc remove their shirts. They replace them with new ones, the next rapper steps up and the process starts over again.

408 AMBITIONZ

Wardrobe changes help lend the illusion that all of this is happening on separate days. In reality, as many

as ten artists are interviewed in a few hours. The episodes are then released weekly, with a day's worth of production comprising a single season.

In its first season, the show was humbly recorded with cell phones. Now, the team of eight includes professional camera and audio technicians, helping capture near-pristine documentation. Hours of work and preparation go into each finished episode, which range from three to five minutes in length.


Occasionally, Quintanilla arranges for a season to be filmed outside his production studio. This new season was all shot at the end of March in Oakland. Season eight was produced at the Tank Shop on San Jose's east side, an urban clothing and art store owned and operated by 408 rapper Yonex Jones.

"There's nothing more San Jose than the Tank Shop," Monc quips.

That particular season differs quite drastically from the show's others. The hosts remained in the same clothes and no interviews took place. Rather, it was a live show of San Jose hip hop "all stars" performing freestyles, one after another—a format traditionally known as a *cypher*.

"We had people from all over San Jose: west side, east side, south side, all the above," Wells says. "They didn't really know each other. But we put them all in that room, they watched each other all cypher, and I watched the camaraderie happen. It's a beautiful thing."

At the end of the day, it's all about building connections within the local scene—and then taking it all beyond.

"The same way we're building relationships with the artists, I see the artists building relationships amongst themselves since they're here hanging out," Monc says. "That shit be dope as shit." 

meant to encourage overexaggerated dancing. Yet, San Jose artists have notoriously struggled to gain acclaim beyond city limits. Monc believes consistency is the key to changing that.

"A lot of people when they do stuff, they're strong for a year or two, but when they don't get the results they want, they fall off. This is one of them things you got to just keep going and you're going to see it in the long run."

The idea for the show came to Wells during the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic, in early fall of 2020.

"I was bored during COVID and

I needed something to do to create content," he says. "I had seen a lack of what we are doing: essentially presenting our scene, San Jose as a whole, to the industry."

Wells took the idea to Quintanilla, a media producer and lover of hip hop, and *Any Given Bars* was born. They were filming their first season by November that same year.

From the beginning, part of the idea was to develop San Jose as a destination for musicians coming through the Bay Area.

"I want San Jose to be a hub for when artists come in for their tour dates," Wells says. "Almost like you

RELEASED
EVERY
FRIDAY

ANY GIVEN BARS

Season 10