



PHOTO COURTESY COLBY COVINGTON

Nerd Bashing Time

**SPRINGFIELD'S COLBY 'CHAOS' COVINGTON
BRINGS THE BELT HOME –
AND TO THE WHITE HOUSE**

BY HENRY HOUSTON

Colby “Chaos” Covington was finally bringing the championship belt home to Springfield after nearly four years in Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC).

The next step was taking the belt to President Donald Trump.

“I told everybody I was going to make the welterweight division great again,” Covington said in a press conference after he won the belt. “And now I’m going to celebrate how a real American should celebrate winning a world title, and that’s going to the White House to see Mr. Donald Trump and put this on his desk.”

He added: “Unlike the Philadelphia Eagles disrespecting our country’s flag by kneeling for the National Anthem.”

Becoming a UFC champion was a sure thing for Covington. He knew he’d taken the title even before the judges’ scores were announced. With his right eye swollen from the fight, he swayed while awaiting the final verdict.

As the announcer teased the results, Covington raised his left arm, expecting victory.

He’d beaten Rafael Dos Anjos by unanimous decision at the June 9 UFC 225 event in Chicago for the welterweight division interim title. He’d proven his online critics wrong. He was championship caliber.

The belt is essentially a temporary title. Although UFC’s recognized champion is Tyron Woodley, who hasn’t defended his title in more than a year, Covington immediately called his title the “real championship belt.”

Interim or not, he wanted to fulfill another promise: bring the belt to Trump’s desk in the Oval Office.

The capacity audience at the match, shrouded in darkness except for the occasional swinging spotlight, didn’t hide its contempt. The crowd shot back with boos and jeers.

Covington doubled down during the post-fight press conference. Donning aviator shades and a bespoke checkered suit with a U.S. flag pin, he loudly cherished each sip from his “nerd tears” water bottle, filled thanks to the “nerds and virgins” from Instagram and Twitter users.

Covington says he’s one of the most hated fighters in UFC. His trash talking, Trump loving and Twitter trolling comes across as genuine, but it also serves a goal: To become the best fighter in the world, so he can give back to his community.

A HOMETOWN HERO

A few weeks after his interim title bout, I visited Covington in the outskirts of Springfield’s Thurston neighborhood. As I walked up to the front door, a nearly six-foot-tall figure greeted me with a smile — a contrast to how Covington presents himself in the limelight.

Wearing tailored sweatpants and a workout shirt, he looked ready to train right after our meeting. A bandage was stuck above his right eye, but he says this wasn’t a relic from the Dos Anjos fight. It was a recent injury incurred while sparring with his partner.

Inside the house, there are a few pictures on the walls, but it’s mostly barren. For furniture, there’s a big screen television, a couple of video games lying on the entertainment center, two couches and a coffee table with Xbox controllers on it.

It’s not the house you’d expect a UFC champion to live in; it’s more a typical bachelor pad, which he shares with a friend. Then again, Covington does spend most of his time training in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Right after I walk inside, he shows off what he’d told me he’d bring back to Oregon: the UFC championship belt. He takes it out of its black canvas bag and hands it over to me.

Without the pomp and circumstance of a UFC event, the belt looks fake at first — as if it’s actually made out of plastic. But, as it rests in my hands, I’m surprised that all of this gold weighs more than I expected.

When Covington speaks, he reveals a calm nature. He speaks softly and with nostalgia when he reflects on the party he had with close friends and family after winning the championship — turning down the Chicago clubs that offered large sums of money for him to appear at their after-party.

But a fire burns immediately within him when talking about his American pride, respecting the presidency, and the fighters and fans that criticize him.

I first met Covington in 2016 before he had grabbed the attention of the mixed martial arts (MMA) community. I was surprised how open he was to the idea of someone to writing about his journey in UFC. And, despite his current trash talking, he’s still that same nice guy.

He invited me to attend a Thurston High School’s wrestling team practice back in 2016. I hadn’t been to a