

JORGE SANTIAGO USES A CLASSIC MILITARY STRATEGY TO GET HIS CAREER BACK ON TRACK.

by Kelly Grigger



The Double Envelopment

At the Battle of Cannae in 216 B.C., the great Carthaginian leader, Hannibal, used the overconfidence of the Roman legions to his advantage. He allowed them to advance toward the center of his lines, where his weakest regiments quickly collapsed and drew the larger enemy force in. Then he sprung his trap, enveloping the tightly formed Romans with his best infantry and speedy cavalry until they were hopelessly surrounded and unable to maneuver. To this day, Cannae is the epitome of the classic double-envelopment strategy studied by every military leader. Jorge Santiago is the reincarnated MMA version of Hannibal. In his last four fights he's drawn his opponents in, using their aggressiveness to his advantage and then catching them with a strike or submission that they never saw coming.

RISING FROM THE ASHES

In December 2006, Santiago was unceremoniously bounced out of the UFC after a three-fight stint that

resulted in one win against Justin Levens and two big knockout losses to Chris Leben and Alan Belcher. Santiago's "lure him in" style has a drawback, as he found out against Belcher. A well-timed kick by Belcher, as Santiago was backpedaling, knocked him out. That's the danger in letting an opponent dictate the pace of battle. If the Romans had cut through Hannibal's lines at Cannae while he was trying to draw them in, it would have been the Romans teaching a case study in "divide and conquer."

"When I got out from the UFC, I had a bad record," Santiago admits in a heavy Brazilian accent. "I came from two losses. Then I started to think about my career. So at that time I start to train more—way more."

The increased training paid off just a few months later. During BodogFight's Clash of the Nations, he faced the hefty task of handling local favorite Andre Semenov, who mounted Santiago late in the first round and delivered a cornucopia of punishment. It was a dire

moment, and one that could have spelled the end of his attempted comeback. Despite Semenov's dominant position, Santiago scrambled for an armbar and eventually got Semenov's back and turned the tide. By the middle of the second round, the vaunted Russian was facedown on the mat absorbing shot after shot until the ref declared the fight a TKO victory for Santiago.

Four months later, at Art of War 3 in Dallas, Texas, Santiago lured opponent Jeremy Horn in and handed the veteran his first submission loss in more than five years. It was literally a double envelopment, as Santiago wrapped his legs around Horn's head and torso in an inescapable triangle choke just three minutes into the fight. As a BJJ black belt under Ricardo Liborio at American Top Team, there was never any doubt that Santiago had a phenomenal ground game, so the win over Horn couldn't be regarded as a fluke. Just a matter of months from his UFC disappointments and his come-from-behind win in Russia, this was a major step up from his previous performances. "I didn't expect to submit Jeremy Horn," Santiago says. "I was expecting to fight three five-minute rounds. I was ready to have a war with him."

PROUD PAPA

Another sea change in Santiago can be attributed to the two females in his life. Shortly after returning from Russia, his wife gave birth to a baby girl. "He changed after his daughter was born," says Liborio. "He became

Second Coming

When you're at the top of your game, you want to fight the best. Jorge Santiago is no different, and as he eyes a return to the biggest stage in MMA, he shares his thoughts on some of the sport's top middleweights.

Anderson Silva:

"He is one of the best. I like his style very much. I try to learn a lot of things from his game. I want to get the same, you know? Great stand-up. Great Muay Thai. Good jiu-jitsu. Good wrestling."

Paulo Filho:

"He's a beast. I never train with him, but I hear from a lot of people if you go to the ground, he's gonna get you. He's one of the best guys in jiu-jitsu. I like his game. His game is go forward, clinch, takedown and finish."

Robbie Lawler:

[Scoffs] "He's an OK guy. He seems like he's a crazy kid. He looks like...I don't know."

Yushin Okami:

"I just saw him fight. He has the same style all Japanese have—good stand-

up, survive on the ground. I want to fight him one day."

Rich Franklin:

"Tough guy, but we saw Anderson beat him like a bitch twice the same way. But he had the courage to come back in the ring and face him again for one more shot. He deserved it. Good fighter. Good heart. He's a tough guy."

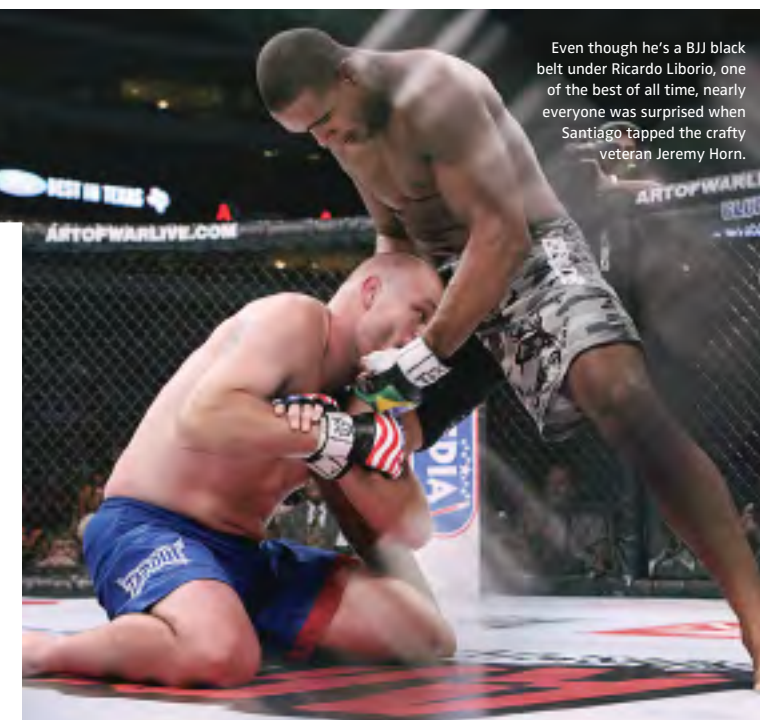
Dan Henderson:

"I like that guy very much. He is a crazy horse. He comes forward all the time. There's five guys I love to watch fight: Dan Henderson, Couture, Anderson Silva, Minotaur...I can't think of the other one."

Matt Lindland:

"I like him, but his stand-up is not as good as his wrestling. You saw Fedor submit him. I know Fedor's a beast."

"I DIDN'T EXPECT TO SUBMIT JEREMY HORN. I WAS READY TO HAVE A WAR WITH HIM."



Even though he's a BJJ black belt under Ricardo Liborio, one of the best of all time, nearly everyone was surprised when Santiago tapped the crafty veteran Jeremy Horn.

COURTESY OF BODOGFIGHT

DAVE MANDEL



next big thing

On the same night Santiago crushed Sean Salmon (far right) with a flying knee in just 24 seconds, he TKO'd the durable Trevor Prangley, who had never been stopped by strikes in his 21-fight career.



“I WANT A SHOT AT [FRANK] SHAMROCK. HE’S THE MAN IN STRIKEFORCE. THEY DIDN’T PROMISE IT, BUT IT’S SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN.”

so focused and trained so much harder than he did before, it’s unbelievable. Watch out for that guy.”

“I have a daughter, so now I have to be more professional,” Santiago says. “I started to change my game, my nutrition, my training, my sleep, everything. Now I know I can go more and more and more. I challenge myself always when I wake up.”

Santiago followed up on his submission over Horn by entering the Strikeforce four-man middleweight tournament in November 2007. In the first round, he made quick cannon fodder of Sean Salmon. Santiago briefly abandoned his double-envelopment strategy in favor of a full-frontal assault. The gambit paid off. Just 24 seconds into the bout he landed a flying knee that instantly KO’d Salmon, who was eventually taken from the ring on a stretcher.

Santiago’s dismantling of rugged South African Trevor Prangley in the tournament’s final match proved that the annihilation of Salmon was not just a lucky shot, it was also a return to his previous game plan. Santiago was content to let Prangley press the action and wait for him to make a mistake. Midway through the first round, Santiago connected with a big shot and then quickly moved in for the clinch, where he threw a devastating knee to the body, and followed it up with three more strikes that forced the TKO. Santiago can now be counted among the few active fighters in a single night, a rarity in modern MMA.

With no notion of slowing down anytime soon, Santiago already has a few opponents in mind, particularly the current Strikeforce middleweight champion. “I want a shot at Shamrock. He’s the man in Strikeforce. They didn’t promise it, but it’s supposed to happen,” he says. His dream fight? “Anderson Silva. He’s the best,” he says.

If Santiago continues his winning ways, he could soon make a return to the Octagon, but this time he’ll be motivated by his baby daughter.

“If I get a good deal, I’ll go back to the UFC,” he says. “I want to go to the UFC. If I have a chance, for sure.” His second time around, Santiago will see which UFC middleweights he can snare with his double-envelopment tactic. 🐼