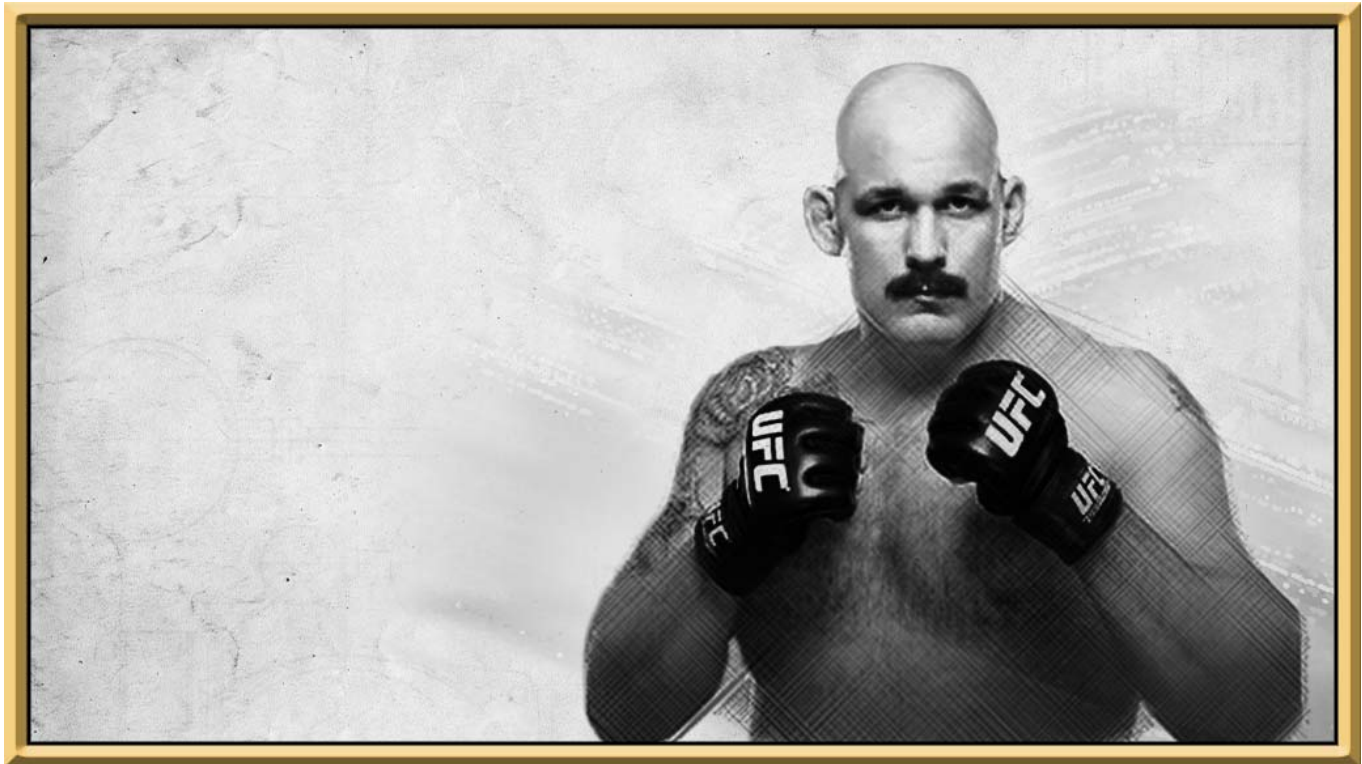


Minnesota Guardsman Earns Unanimous Decision Win in Third UFC Fight

By Pablo Villa - NCO Journal

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Sgt. Timothy Johnson has relied heavily on grit to get him through the trials of life. On Sunday, it got him through his third fight as a member of the UFC.

Johnson, a Soldier in the Minnesota National Guard's 134th Brigade Support Battalion, earned a tough unanimous decision victory over Marcin Tybura. The heavyweight bout was part of the main card of "UFC Fight Night: Rothwell vs. Dos Santos" in Zagreb, Croatia, and was broadcast live on Fox Sports 1.

Johnson (10-2, 2-1 in the UFC) got the win his way, shutting down the Brazilian jiu-jitsu tactician for the first 10 minutes of the fight then holding off a furious Tybura rally in the third round that ended with Johnson suffering a severe injury to the orbital bone around his left eye. That wasn't all he had to contend with. In the second round, Johnson appeared to injure his left arm after a front kick from Tybura. But that didn't stop the 6-foot-3, 265-pound Guardsman, whose ability to adapt to adversity has only been strengthened by his time as an NCO.

"You learn to be Gumby, to be flexible," Johnson told the NCO Journal before the fight. "(Being an

NCO) it's taught me to get in there, it's taught me to have the mentality of just going and getting the work done."

Johnson did just that Sunday. He opened the fight by staying outside and landing punches on Tybura. The initial strategy was a wise one as Tybura is an accomplished Brazilian jiu-jitsu tactician and a former M-1 Global fighting champion. When the fighters did engage in the clinch, Johnson, a former National Junior College Athletic Association Wrestling All-American, used his grappling prowess to push Tybura to the fence, wearing the Polish fighter down with his 15-pound weight advantage. The process repeated for two rounds and Johnson appeared headed for a smooth victory.

But the third round brought difficulty. Early in the round, Tybura ducked underneath a Johnson haymaker and scored a takedown. He quickly took Johnson's back, where he had several submission avenues open. But Johnson bulled his way out of danger, prying Tybura off and returning the fight to the middle of the octagon. Tybura's salvo wasn't finished yet. He closed the round with a flurry of strikes and kicks but Johnson held fast, despite the rapid swelling around his eye. Tybura won the round but it remained a 29-28 decision for Johnson, who left the arena immediately for the hospital.

The extent of Johnson's injury wasn't clear, but he indicated on social media that doctors performed a CT scan of his eye, a procedure often used to identify fractures. But fighting through injury and hardship is part of the game — as a Soldier and a fighter — and Johnson doesn't intend to disappoint on either count.

"I do think I have to represent a little bit," he said before the fight. "I can't get into a submission and just tap out right away. I've got to make sure I keep fighting for a bit. Actually, it's a running joke I have with a couple guys at the gym. I've got to show the rest of the world that America isn't as weak as it's perceived on TV."

The win helps give Johnson some career clarity. He has one fight remaining on his UFC contract and has less than five months left on his National Guard contract. Along with being a fighter and a Soldier, he also works as a bouncer at a Fargo, North Dakota, bar and occasionally drives trucks on weekends.

"As of right now, I'm leaning toward re-upping," Johnson said. "The thing is, I'd probably get out and then three years down the line I'd probably try to get back in so I might as well stick with it."