

Film Close-Up: Vinnie Jones

by Joey_Berlin

Vinnie Jones is the brute who nearly upstages wrestler Stone Cold Steve Austin as the baddest dude in the new action flick "The Condemned." The ex-soccer star learned to get comfortable in front of a camera when he had to give lots of interviews to the British sports media, for good reasons and bad reasons, but mostly the latter.

VINNIE JONES - Soccer star Vinnie Jones plays a convicted killer selected to fight to the finish in the action movie 'The Condemned.' CNS Photo courtesy of Lionsgate.

Once counted among the toughest and most physically aggressive men in his sport, Jones set a still-standing record for getting penalized in a soccer game after only three seconds. Jones transitioned to a film career nearly a decade ago with his first role in "Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels." He has appeared in more than 30 movies since, most memorably as Juggernaut in "X-Men: The Last Stand."

In "The Condemned," Jones co-stars opposite wrestling star Steve Austin as one of several killers plucked from death row to face off on a small island. The fight to the finish is broadcast live on the Internet as a bloody brand of reality programming.

At 42, Jones is pleased that his image as the soccer star turned actor is slowly fading away. He has several films slated for release this year including "The Riddle," in which he stars as a reporter opposite Derek Jacobi and Vanessa Redgrave. In "The Riddle," Jones notes, "There's no bashing people up or anything."

Q: Since you are used to doing physical stuff, were you prepared to do all these action scenes? Was filming "The Condemned" like a walk in the park for you?

A: You know, we got down there early and prepared for it and I think it showed. I mean, we did some great stuff there. Plenty of bruises and cuts, real ones, along the way. But as we said at the beginning, if you're going to get the camera in close you can't use them doubles and the stunt boys, you know? So what sort of movie do you want? Do you want to come down here early, work at it and go for it? Or do you want to be a bit Hollywood and we'll put the stuntmen in and pull the camera back? So Steve and myself said, "Let's do this!"

Q: "The Condemned" also seems to have something serious to say about violence and entertainment.

A: That's why this movie's important. It's saying, "Do you enjoy watching this?" Be careful because this is going to come and bite you in the butt. How long until someone does this? We've already got cage fighting with no rules in Vegas. What happens when we take the cage away? What happens when Vince McMahon

buys an island and does this for fun on a Sunday afternoon?

Q: You were in a WWE event with Stone Cold Steve Austin once. Who knew that years later, you guys would be making a movie together?

A: That was the funniest thing. I got a call and they said Stone Cold is doing a movie. And it was like, oh, his career must be coming to an end now (laughs). So this is his new career, and I have to take my hat off to the fellow. He's done a fantastic job. And what impressed me more than anything, the first thing he said when he came on was, "Look, I know this is my first job. I don't pretend I know it for one minute. As much help as any of you can give me, I'll take it." And when someone does that you just want to help him as much as you can. You want the person to succeed.

Q: What did you guys do during downtime on the set?

A: We were playing tricks on each other, constantly. On one morning at 6:30 in the jungle, I opened my trailer door and this blow-up nurse doll with a big smile popped up. And then I went up to the bed and there was another nurse in there which popped up as I went to get changed, which is quite frightening up in the jungle at 6:30 in the morning.

Q: As you know, soccer star David Beckham and his wife are coming to Los Angeles. Is that going to get Americans interested in soccer? And do you expect to see him start a movie career, as has been suggested?

A: I've played against him, obviously. But you know, I wonder if it's about him or her, you know? Who have they signed, Mr. or Mrs.? Because it's all about her. But I've got more interest in what the sales are in Bloomingdale's today than them coming over, to be honest. He struggles doing an interview, let alone acting, you know? You don't come to this town and say, "I'm going to be an actor." There's millions and millions of people that have passed through these roads that have tried it, with their whole life savings. That'd be my advice. Don't think you're going to come here and pull the wool over anybody's eyes.

Q: Your progression in Hollywood was not an easy, overnight success story. For you, was it harder to get into soccer and become good at that, or get into acting?

A: I mean, I came off a building site and I had a little glimmer of a chance to become a pro and I took it open-handed. As a youngster, when all my mates were drinking and grabbing the women, I was training. I was training on my own, I was pounding the streets. And that's one thing that ticks me off about where I got to in my career, is when people say, "Oh, he's a lucky so-and-so." I was never lucky. Because what I didn't have in ability, I had in strength and honor, you know?

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