

## **S4 E21: Impacting Others**

(AJ II & Rashard Fant)

*Previously recorded on Wednesday, August 28th, 2019*

0:00 AJ: The NFL's Rashard Fant has been nursing injuries ever since he has entered the league. But the former Big Ten standout has always used more than just his game to make an impact. Stay tuned, you're listening to *Max Out Time!*

0:14 Intro Song: 'For the City'

0:52 AJ: Fant, how you doing my man?

0:54 Rashard: What's up my brother? AJ III! Good to be here today.

0:57 AJ: Man, what's going on? Are you still on the honeymoon? Where you at nowadays?

1:02 Rashard: No honeymoon out here in the Windy City!

1:04 AJ [laughs]

1:06 Rashard: Rehabbing, just finished up grad school and enjoying life right now brother!

1:10 AJ: Might be a tad bit chilly out there in the windy city for the honeymoon, but I know that ya'll went to some exotic tropical place, and just kicked back, and did your thing. Congratulations again on the Master's degree, two degree'd up out here and a professional athlete.

1:29 Rashard: Thank you, thank you! You know what they say, Black Excellence my brother!

1:32 AJ: That is true. We're always and forever striving for that, Black Excellence. Literally, your resume speaks Black Excellence as a professional athlete. What else are you involved in and who is Rashard Fant?

1:45 Rashard: You know, defining Rashard Fant for me, I would say first, I am a child of God, follower in Christ, for me personally, and now a husband, a brother, son, a friend, an athlete, a scholar. I'm really big on advocating for educating and supporting the youth. My two life models is to positively effect and impact as many lives as possible. Like Coach Shelby, our cornerbacks coach at IU, always used to say, "leave places better than when you got there." I really believe that in everything I do. I love giving back, I love working with youth. Especially ages between 14 and 22, I believe that's the most critical time for the development for them as a person, and yourself finding out what you like to do, and what

you want to get into, and what your interests are, and where you want to take your life uh as you continue to grow, and go onto new places.

2:44 AJ: Well my brother you are a true testament of leaving a place better than when you found it. And and when you talk about in the classroom, on the field and in the community, especially. I mean you were a triple threat in that regard. We appreciate you, the Bloomington community appreciate you, the IU football community, just the whole nine, it goes down the list. Now as you transitioned, where do your passions lie and what are you doing currently?

3:12 Rashard: Currently, just as I said, I've finished my Master's in public affairs from IU. I'm currently with the Bears organization, Chicago bears –

3:20 AJ: Da bears! Da bears! [laughs]

3:26 Rashard [laughs] That's definitely been a great opportunity, a dream of mine. Right now sadly, but also positively, I'm rehabbing an injury right now, and trying to get back for the 2020 football season coming up next year.

3:39 AJ: So, rehabbing an injury, what injury are you dealing with and what has that process been like? Just a back story on you, you have yet to play any snaps pre season or regular season for the Bears, although this will be your second year with the team. What happened? Can you take us back to draft day, pro day, the combine, all of that and what led to this point?

4:04 Rashard: Yeah it's crazy, you know, going back to my senior year, I decided to come back instead of entering the draft earlier as a junior. That season going in and hearing you know everything that oh you're a top ten corner coming in, here's a draft, knowing all of this at least in the first three rounds, knowing my life can change and I get injured in pre-season before camp at IU. It was a tough injury, so I'm sitting there and thinking I just twisted my ankle and then we realized it's not that so it's some calf tightness, achilles tendonitis and it's not that either. Finally, we get a specialist, and he tells me I have an extra bone in my ankle, and I can get surgery with a 5 to 6 weeks recovery, or I can just play through the pain, which I decided to play through the pain because it's the middle of the season, I rehabbed –

4:58 AJ: I mean you were trying to get a bowl game at that point, there's a lot at stake for you and you got to play for your draft stock as well.

5:04 Rashard: No, definitely, and that's the biggest thing, you miss five games in the season, you are projected first round pick for a sure thing, you better recover from that. So for me,

playing through the injury for my teammates for myself. Us getting into another bowl game, once we sadly lost the last game of the season –

5:26 AJ: Man, man you didn't have to bring that over the airwaves! My-my record is clean! We didn't have to bring that one through the air like that you know [laughs]. What happened at that point?

5:42 Rashard: So at that point, the season ends, so we go down to schedule the surgery already to get this extra bone out knowing that okay it's time rehab, and get ready for pro day, and combine. Even though the invites haven't been out yet at that point yet. So, I had the surgery, very positive, excited for what's to be in the future for myself, and I am rehabbing, and get back to myself. I am in Miami, Florida training at Bommarito Performance, I'm running low 4.3s so I am ready for the combine, get to the combine, I'm having great meetings, coach's seeing how I run, excited to see my drills, and lift to see how strong I was –

6:23 AJ: And then boom!

6:25 Rashard: Yeah, boom! On 225 test as you know and my pec tears on rep seven as the weight felt extremely easy. So, it's just one of those things like wow –

6:37 AJ: It ain't the old Fant as they say.

6:38 Rashard: Nah, not the old Fant. I was a little stronger at this point in my career. Not the 150 freshman Fant.

6:45 AJ: Big swole.

6:47 Rashard: Yeah, big swole, as I like to say big dog, not little dog!

6:50 AJ: [laughs] Big dog, not little dog! So, we grew into a German Shepherd, but we we got into two injuries, but now you fight through that, and you actually get some looks from teams, and you end up with the Bears. You're killing it and you're on the roster, pre-season and camp comes around and then what happens next. What happens next, and what has transpired since then?

7:17 Rashard: Yeah, we were about eight days into camp at this point, five days away from the first pre-season game. I'm doing my thing and getting more reps especially since I had to miss the off-season training due to my pec injury. I break up a pass on my last play of practice, and a teammate falls on my knee, and I get up and try, and walk it off but I couldn't walk –

7:42 AJ: No pressure on or nothing –

7:44 Rashard: No pressure, nothing, and when I talked to the doctors, it looks like just a bruised bone and you'll be back within a week and I'm like okay that's great news, cool it stinks but I'll be back. Then, after about two weeks, I'm like, I'm struggling to walk. I can't even try to run and they don't really know what's going on so then we decided at the end of pre season, let's just put you on injured reserve, have surgery, so I sat on injury reserve all year, rehabbing. About five months into my rehab, we think I am supposed to be cleared at this point, but I'm on the field running and jogging and I'm limping around. I'm having a lot of pain and then we got another MRI and it shows I have bone marrow edema which is a lot of fluid built up in my knee causing a lot of pain –

8:30 AJ: And that came from that that one freak occurrence in training camp?

8:36 Rashard: That is honestly the mystery, we don't know if it was lingering from that or if rehab was taken a toll on it still. It never really just was able to heal, so that was the hard part. They decided, let's just take five months of just resting to see if it gets better because sometimes it does, but mine never did. That's when I had to make the decision to get another scope surgery and just figure this thing out. With time they figured it out, I had a bigger flap which they needed to remove, that's what they did. So, I'm back at it, year two, rehabbing but excited for it, going to push through it and get back and ready to start getting back on the field around February/March of 2020.

9:21 AJ: Man, what I am saying though is we are pulling for you man. It just sounds like it's been setback/comeback, setback/comeback. The last year and a half or so and maybe even two years. What I want to ask to you, just as someone who has known you and someone who has known that perseverance and that mind set that you have had, and I don't think I saw you really t get injured, injured in college. Has these last two years been the toughest period of your life, going through a lot of your hardships?

9:56 Rashard: Yeah, I probably wouldn't even say the toughest but I would probably say the most frustrating, because you know you're good enough to be playing and you would be if you weren't injured, it's just unfortunate injuries that are freak accidents. My pec tearing was a freak accident. I was doing 225 as you know we do that like clockwork every year –

10:17 AJ: You know when you got Coach Hill, you know what I'm saying, and they throwing the weight around, Coach Hill and Coach Peeps you know –

10:25 Rashard: Making sure you get it, so I would never think that I would tear my pec and then I hurt my knee on the normal breaking up a pass, it's normal, I've done that plenty of times in my career. It's probably been the toughest, but I think going through all the hardships and adversity that I've been through growing up and early on in college when I didn't know a lot of people, people had the red shirt...and being small. That was probably the hardest times and the toughest times –

10:50 AJ: I remember those days –

10:53 Rashard: Yeah, our first year in college definitely was trying and tough and being away from family for the first time. I think those times really prepared me. And then just being able to know – it all about persistence, thinking you know, let's not feel sorry for myself, I'm blessed, I'm healthy, my family's healthy, I have great friends in my life, great family in my life, and just knowing God has a plan for any situation that you're in. You just got to trust and have the faith and keep pushing on.

11:22 AJ: Well, I know you have a strong faith, you're very strong willed, there is a scripture that you live by and there's a reason that why you wear number 16 and everything. So, I understand what you're going through but I also understand how you've abled to...you've managed to get back on your feet as they say, every single time. If we just to shift gears a little bit to someone who essentially, let's just call it what it is, called it quits recently, because of hardships physically mentally and emotionally. Former Indianapolis quarterback, Andrew Luck retired on Saturday during a pre-season game actually which he wasn't playing in due to a lower leg injury. I'm not going to call it an ankle because we really don't know. He has a lot of things going on, but the man said this:

12:16 [AUDIO: Andrew Luck]: For the last four years or so I've been in the cycle of injury, pain, rehab, injury, pain, rehab and it's been unceasing and unrelenting both in season and off-season. I felt stuck in it and the only way I see out is it to no longer play football.

12:42 AJ: Injury, pain, rehab, injury, pain, rehab. From your perspective what is Andrew Luck, a Pro Bowl quarterback, one of the top five quarterbacks in the entire NFL has had an amazing career even through all the hardships in the past four years. From your perspective as someone who has gone from injury to injury, whether it's college or the NFL, what's he really going through?

13:17 Rashard: You know the hardest thing for me and I always say everyone's perspective is different, from me looking from the outside in for him. I just think, like you said injury, pain and rehabbing. Consistently having to play a game, where you can't really go out there and

play, because you're injured and then you got to through that pain every day. Then rehabbing and throughout that rehab, you have a lot of pain as you would know and everyone else that's been injured. I think it's mentally, you just like man I'm not even preparing for the game, I'm not going on the field, mentll I am just worried about if I'm healthy enough to go out there, can I compete at the highest level. For him, a hall of fame, all pro level –

13:57 AJ: Hall of Fame and let's just call it what it is, he's got a hall of fame career and he's played six years in the NFL, I mean he's a remarkable quarterback, one of the best of this century maybe.

14:11 Rashard: No definitely, and he has lived up to the hype since he was drafted, I wanted to say 2012. [AJ II: Mhm. Yes]. He holds himself to a high standard and probably for him, he's like I can't do what I want to do but you think about the injuries, the lacerated kidneys, the bruise ribs, the concussions, then you have the ankle, calf, the mysterious injury, and that can really weigh on you. Each week, some people don't understand because they haven't played any sport but each week on game day, the coaches, the fans expect you to best your best. They don't see in between that how much pain you're in. You got to get yourself mentally and has physically ready as you can to play in that game on Saturday or Sunday. Nobody wants to hear that excuse that you're hurt, if you're out there, you're good to go –

15:03 AJ: Yes you are.

15:04 Rashard: So nobody wants to hear that and for him, he may not have felt that he could give one hundred percent or play to the level that he is capable of playing with the injuries he went through, and the mental state that he was in. Everybody knows if you're mental state is not there, it's hard to kind of play to the best of your ability.

15:22 AJ: It came as a shock just because of the fact that it was breaking news, Adam Schefter, you see the tweet, I was watching ESPN. I think I was watching the Miami game at the time, and after that it was kind of like wow, he just retired pre season game, he wasn't even playing at the season hasn't even started like that was the shocking part. We knew about the injuries, the four years of hardships, and it was just clear to me watching the press conference afterwards. You know he held a 25 minute press conference where he also took questions from reporters, it was also clear to me that he hit not only a physical - a physical wall, but an emotional and mental wall. Like I said before, you're strong willed, you have a strong faith, you've been through these these peaks and valleys within your professional and

even collegiate career. How would you explain pushing through that metaphorical wall? In football and in injuries, we just have to find a way to push through and every single time, you have come out on top, what is your strategy?

16:33 Rashard: For me I think when it comes to dealing with adversaries, hardships, whether it be injuries or losing somebody or off your game, I have five keys that for me work to deal with adversity, and help me head it face on. The first one starts with **1)** believing in yourself, when things get hard, to still have that belief that I am one of the best players out here, or I'm the best student or the best lawyer, doctor that I can be. And I know I can do this job with the best of them so, always keeping that. The second one is **2)** keeping a positive mind set, perception, keeping a great supporting cast around you, it all goes into keeping a positive mind set. If you have a great supporting cast, they're going to speak positivity in you, into your life and not let you get down, it just helps you and uplifts you and helps you understand that, you know what, I'm going through something right now but I am going to get through it and come up on the other side. The next one for me is **3)** cherishing the process, embracing that adversity. It's going to come at your fast and hard but go right back at it, face it head first, don't shy away from it, don't try and avoid it, just take it on. **4)** Being consistent, especially as a football player like me. For me, if I'm going through hard times on the football field it makes me like okay let me work harder, let me still do the things I'd do even if I was playing great. You don't want to be like man 'I went through a hard time, let me stop doing this, or stop doing that, I feel sorry for myself'. Be consistent in the things you do because it'll pay off once you get over that mountain. Then, the last thing is just for me and maybe for some others is **5)** believe in trusting in a higher power. We're blessed to be here, everything that I have is a blessing and I'm grateful for and I know that somebody gave it to me. I like to call him God, other people have other names for him which is great. Just having a higher power that you trust and you have faith in always helps and my favourite quote in line with adversity came from Nipsey Huddle, you know what it says, "The game is going to test you but never fold, stay 10 toes down. It's not on you, it's in you and what's in you they can't take away." Knowing that and believing that and facing adversity head on and coming out on the other side to success or reach the goals you want to reach.

18:47 AJ: R.I.P Nipsey. Now I thought you were a J Cole fan and that came out of left field for you.

18:53 Rashard: [laughs] I'm a J Cole fan that's number one, Nipsey fan for about three to four years. Then seeing everything he is doing in the community in the last year and a half to two years for me I just got into him and kept a close eye and it's sad to see him go.

19:08 AJ: Yeah and his death was a tragedy in so many ways for our community and the community in Los Angeles what he was doing, what he was preaching about through his lyrics and just through his life and how he's changed his life around and done a complete 180. I do sincerely mean a RIP Nipsey. You talked about five main points that have pushed you in believing in a higher power and cherishing the sport and belief. But what if some of these hardships that you are going through, what if they're out of your control? I think it's also important to note that, you know, we might be going through something and we don't know it. It reminds me of [Kevin Love's Players' Tribune article](#) he that wrote; everyone is going through something. It was the first time that a professional athlete really opened up about mental health. It was the first time that someone said, I had a panic attack during the middle of the game and I had to run back to the locker room, and now he sees a medical professional about it, but before he thought as a man, you couldn't even do that. You you couldn't show weakness, you couldn't show emotion, so why is it important for an athlete to take care of their mental health as well as other things that they physically can't control?

20:28 Rashard: No definitely, mental health is always important for athletes but for any human being no matter what occupation you're in. We all go through our different trials and tribulations and struggles. It's always good to know that people are there, people who love you and are close to you, people you may not have met that want listen and want to help you. You're right, no matter what you go through, we're all humans, everybody goes through trials and tribulations and sometimes no matter what advice you get and what methods you try to take to come over whatever you're dealing with, it may not help. You need to talk to somebody, open up, go seek help. That's actually being strong. A lot of times in society, that used to be a weakness, especially for men, but it's okay. Athletes I think, personally as an athlete what I've been taught, push through, fight, be tough, be strong but it's like man, if I'm going through something I can't talk to somebody because that's weak, coach might think it's weak, it's actually not. What Kevin Love did, I can't think of her last name, I want to say Liz Cambage, with the Las Vegas aces, the WNBA, she opened up about it as well, we all need someone to talk to, we need need to go get help outside of the normal things that we try and that's okay. Okay to go, and try to be strong, and go get help and address any mental health issue that you may be going through and dealing with at the moment.

22:12 AJ: I mean, I think that is great advice and great advice for athletes. Not only for athletes but for people battling through hardships, and battling through things that are out of their control, whether it be depression, or mental health issues. It's fitting that you are someone who is giving that advice, because I've always seen you as--as a leader, whether it

be on the field, whether it be in the classroom or in the community. Like I said, your resume speaks to just leadership, and being a positive influence, a positive Black man in the community whatever the community might be. But, you're also, I would also describe you as an activist. I know you remember that day like it was yesterday because I do as well. We were playing Ohio state, the national anthem came on, it was round about the same time that Colin Kaepernick had just began to kneel during the national anthem and protest racial inequities in this country specifically police brutality against unarmed black people and you raised your fist during the national anthem.

23:19 Rashard: Yep, I remember.

23:21 AJ: Why are these issues so important to you? Of racial, social and civil injustice? And also I think I've seen a maturation process out of you because you've always been great on the field and great in other areas, but the voice wasn't always there. Year 3, year 4, year 5 you weren't only a leader on the field because of your play, and your style of play, but you also became a leader in other areas because you started to speak up. You started to write, you wrote a note to Indiana University, you wrote a piece in the Athlete's guide, you became more outspoken and that wasn't the case when we were redshirt freshman. So, how did that transition work out for you and what goes through your head when you see these social, and civil injustices in the world?

24:12 Rashard: No, definitely, I think for me I'd like to say that the most beautiful and rewarding journey of all, is the journey of finding yourself. For me it's learning that you are more than an athlete, you are more than the football you took up, or the basketball you took up or for other people soccer, baseball that you took up, whatever that may be, you are more than that. I had to learn that, even in high school, I was a great student, I was a football player but deep down it was football, football, football. Throughout college, the adversity I was going through especially not playing, I found other areas to impact lives in to make changes in. For me when it comes to social injustice issues, for me growing up in the South for one, as a Black male, you face different things that some people don't face. Coming to IU when I had a diversity class and I spoke about the confederate flag being used to kind of show, like hey you don't belong here and this is where we stay. You know when I said that some young ladies were like, no way the confederate flag is another flag. I was like, where are you from and she's like Indiana, I can kind of understand that when you're not from the South you may not know the history –

25:24 AJ: Sometimes you got to come to that middle ground with them, and lay it down for them.

25:28 Rashard: There definitely was a great dialogue between us that I enjoyed educating her, but also knowing that not everybody understands how those symbols and methods can be used. I know me knowing that myself, my little sister, my wife, my future kids and my friends' future kids, they could be walking on the street and not do anything wrong and something could happen to them. They could get pulled over and falsely accused or identified wrong. I had a friend wrongly identified and put in jail, and it wasn't even him [AJ II: Yeah that happens, too.]. You go through those hardships, so you want to change it, because at the end of the day, it doesn't matter you skin color or your gender, we are all equal, we all bring value into this world, and we all have something to give. We should be treated as such as we should treat each other as such, you know.

We should fight for unity, and spread love, and that's the biggest thing, supporting each other, spreading love to everybody, no matter what you look like, or where you may come from. And I I think additionally when you look at different role models, starting from Muhammed Ali to Bill Russell who did a lot even before we were alive. Now you see nowadays with the LeBron James', the Venus and Serena Williams', the Megan Rapinoe's, the Kevin Durant's, all that they do, the Steph Curry's, all that they do to support and fight, D Wade, Chris Paul, so many nowadays.

27:02 AJ II: Melo right there, too.

27:03 Rashard: Yeah Melo. They're activists, they're fighting for change, they're trying to use their voice, and their platforms to make lives better for us, and our kids to come, and for their kids to come, for future generations down the line. Get everything the way it should be, as one and with a lot of love, unity and uh equality.

27:26 AJ: Spread love, it's the Brooklyn way, I mean, you said it so eloquently, and and gave us the good word today, as they say in church, on mental health issues, and battling through injuries, and being a positive beacon of light for Black and Brown people, not only in the athletic and sports world but in this country as a whole, and you are truly a leader. Again, I wish you the best of success in your medical hardships, and in fighting through everything right now which I know you will do as you continue on with the Bears, but also just being a leader and being a friend. I just want to thank you for coming on the show today. As always my very special guest, he only has one name, it's like Ghandi and Prince, Fant, we don't call

him Rashard no more, we just call him Fant. Ok, you want to leave everybody with another note of positivity?

28:25 Rashard: For me I just want to say thanks again my brother, Arthur always for having me, it was an honour and I look forward to part two down the road at some point. You know my Instagram and Twitter handle is just @rashardfant really simple. At the end of the day I just want to leave ya'll with my favourite bible verse, Deuteronomy 31:6 "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you." I hope that this blesses somebody today and helps them get through whatever they may be going through. Much love to you AJ and to everyone out there listening.

29:01 AJ: Thank you Fant, be easy man.

29:03 Rashard: You too brother, thank you.

29:05 AJ: Please continue subscribing at *Max Out Time* with AJ II on iTunes. If you wish to follow his journey in the NFL, add @rashardfant on social media. Like me on Facebook, follow on IG and Twitter rate and review this podcast on all podcast streaming services today, AJ out!

29:25 Outro Song: 'For The City'

29:53 –End–

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