

Operation Worldwide: Kent Washington  
By: Peyton Garcia

A rowdy sea of 500 people pushed and shoved before him at the foot of the stage. They jeered and shouted, ushering him to start his performance. He gripped the microphone tighter and took a deep breath, knowing that if he messed this up it was over for good.

Sixteen-year-old Kent Washington, couldn't believe his eyes when celebrity American hip-hop artist, Hopsin, pulled him onstage at his Colorado Springs concert in the fall of 2011. Washington, along with two others, had been picked from the audience to take part in a rap contest.

"All I could think was, 'If I get booed off stage at The Black Sheep venue, I'm definitely quitting music,'" Washington said. He exploded into a 16-bar rap verse that he'd written himself. The crowd went wild and he won by a landslide. "I grabbed the microphone and transformed into a different person. It felt like it was my show. That was the start of Kent Washington."

Kent Washington was born and raised in Colorado Springs. His love for creating music was developed early on. "I was seven years old and I would use the karaoke machine to practice rapping," he reminisced. By the time Washington was 14 and attending Mesa Ridge High School, he tried selling his first mixtape.

"People hated it," Washington said. "They would tell me that I was garbage and to stay away from rapping. It was really discouraging."

However, Washington refused to be disheartened. It was the Hopsin concert that launched his career. Out of the 500 audience members at The Black Sheep concert venue that night, Washington believes it was more than luck that put him on that stage.

"I don't believe in luck," Washington said. "I believe things happen for a reason. I believe I was in the right place at the right time." He left the concert venue feeling better about his music than he had in years. "My phone was blowing up after the concert. Everyone at school the next day had something to say about it."

"Kent and I have known each other for a long time," said Jack Krause, a classmate of Washington's. "We weren't super close friends, but he was very well-known around school, and nobody expected such a burst of talent from him."

Krause and Washington not only currently attend Colorado State University together, but Krause sets Washington up with gigs he hears of around town. "He has headlined 'Open-Mic Night' the last three weeks at the restaurant I work at." Krause said. "He has a lot of sway with a lot of people in this town and it's brought in a lot of customers."

Krause and Washington both study Theater at CSU. "I have an incredible amount of admiration for him as an artist," Krause said. "He is a very talented man."

After the Hopsin concert, with a fresh bout of confidence, Washington called up Sunshine Studios in Colorado Springs looking to book his first concert. "They didn't take me seriously at all," Washington said. The representatives at Sunshine Studios, oozing skepticism, told him if he could sell at least 20 pre-sale tickets they'd give him the entire venue for the night. Washington returned to the studio two days later not only having

sold his 20 pre-sale tickets, but requesting 100 more. By the end of the week, Washington had sold 500 tickets, successfully selling out the Sunshine Studios venue on his own.

“It was very fulfilling after coming from a place where people said I couldn’t do it,” Washington said. In a matter of weeks Kent Washington transformed from a nobody to Colorado Springs’ next big thing.

Since his first concert with Sunshine Studios, Washington has sold out every show that followed with audiences ranging from 500 to 1,000 people. Washington has also had the opportunity to meet several of today’s most influential hip-hop artists including Casey Veggies, Ty Dolla Sign, and Denzel Curry.

“I’ve met all these famous people and they say, ‘you have what it takes to make it,’ and that’s what drives me,” Washington said. “Two years ago, I was on stage with Hopsin; a couple months ago, I was the opening act for him.”

According to friends, Washington has a drive unlike his competitors. “I will do anything. I’m determined to make it. Period. A lot of rappers don’t think big enough. It’s hard, I understand that, but I think a lot of people are just scared.”

Washington demonstrates an outstanding level of perseverance and guts. “I don’t just rap,” Washington said. “I rap, I’m an entrepreneur, I design stages, I act. I do anything. I’m just determined. The goal is to go worldwide. You can’t be one-dimensional.”

As his career excelled, Washington reached out to two former high school classmates also looking to launch a music career. Together, the three founded “No Coast”, a movement for talented individuals pursuing professional music.

“No Coast” has since grown to include 12 independent artists out of Colorado who write their own music, produce their own videos and book their own shows.

“No Coast represents Colorado,” Washington explained. “The objective is to become successful, while carrying Colorado on our backs. There are talented people here. There is a scene here, but people don’t even look at Colorado as far as hip-hop is concerned. We want to break that barrier.”

The “No Coast” company has opened for famous hip-hop artists including Hopsin and Dizzy-Wright. “God has a plan for me,” Washington said. “We have some big stuff in the works for you guys.”

Working as a full-time student at CSU Washington continues to dedicate a merciless amount of time to “No Coast” and his personal music career. He hopes pursuing a degree in theater will help him become the best performer he can be.

“The goal is to go worldwide,” Washington said. “I won’t stop until I’m there.”