

Warning: count(): Parameter must be an array or an object that implements Countable in [/home/lasvega1/mopupduty.com/wp-includes/post-template.php](#) on line 284

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/ May 1, 2010

Gregg Zaun Bio

by Callum Hughson(<http://mopupduty.com/author/newcal/>)



(<http://i2.wp.com/mopupduty.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/gregg-zaun.jpg>).

With the signing of reclamation project John Buck – who has a chance to be good – I am reminded of another reclamation project

who turned out to be good: Gregg Zaun. A quick search in our search bar at the top right of the screen will lead you to many posts fetishizing the “heart” and “grit” and “bleached blond tips” that Zaun displayed during his time in Toronto. However, we’ve never done a full on profile of the man they call “Z-Man” so here it is, long overdue.



(<http://i2.wp.com/mopupduty.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/zaun-rookie.jpg>)

The nephew of former Baltimore Orioles catcher Rick Dempsey, Gregg Zaun was picked in the 13th round of the 1989 draft by the same team his Uncle played for. Six years later, Zaun made his major league debut in June of 1995. The following season Baltimore sent Zaun to the Florida Marlins for Terry Matthews(<http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/m/mathete01.shtml>). It was here that Zaun backed up catcher Charles Johnson on the way to a World Series title in 1997.



(<http://i1.wp.com/mopupduty.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/zaun-world-series.jpg>).

Following the 1997 season, Zaun played for 4 teams over the next 4 seasons: The Texas Rangers, Detroit Tigers, Kansas City Royals and Houston Astros. After a season and a few months with Houston, Zaun was on the move again: first to Colorado and then to Montreal. The reason for his nomadic playing career was rooted in his problem drinking. He spent too many nights at the bar, too many afternoons becoming numb on whiskey.

An all-night, all-day drive from his Texas home to spring training on Florida's east coast in February of 2004 had Gregg Zaun in serious need of a drink.

He arrived in the city of Melbourne, dumped his bags in his Radisson Suites hotel room and raced across the parking lot to Lou's Blues, the first bar he saw. He ordered a hamburger and then, over the next few hours, methodically chased it down with six bottles of Coors Light and **five double shots of Johnny Walker Black**. The numbing sensation in which Zaun had so often found comfort slowly began to

blur his evening into deepest night. It wasn't until the next morning, his head hazy, temples throbbing and mouth bitter, that Zaun lay in bed "feeling like garbage" and wondered why he kept on doing this to himself.

The free-spirited Zaun had that drinker's gene. He doesn't consider himself an alcoholic, but was "really good at drinking" and on the way to becoming his family's latest sad statistic.

“

"We have alcoholism in our family," Zaun said. "My uncle, Pat, he struggled with alcohol and drug addiction. My uncle, Tom, he struggled with it as well and my grandfather, it killed him. People in my family either get the gene or they don't."

"My biggest thing is that when I drank, I had a hard time moderating it," he said. "I either drank or I didn't. There was no in-between, I was either completely sober or I went out and drank until I was drunk." ”

Baseball has come a long way from the hard-drinking days of Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb and Mickey Mantle, where consuming alcohol to excess was a rite of passage. But Sam McDowell, the chief therapist for the Baseball Assistance Team — a group providing support to ex-major leaguers — said he still gets 100 to 150 new cases each year of former players signing up for alcohol abuse counselling.

McDowell struck out 2,453 batters with the New York Yankees and Pittsburgh Pirates before alcoholism shortened his career in 1976. He said today's players are health conscious and eager to avoid heavy drinking, but those with a family history of alcoholism and genetic pre-disposition to it are at risk.

“I didn’t even start drinking until two or three years into my career,” he said. “But I became known as one of the more famous alcoholics in baseball.” ”

Zaun didn’t wait that long to start drinking. Being groomed as a catcher since his youth in Glendale, California also conditioned him for baseball’s nocturnal culture, where alcohol was a constant presence.

“I was always thinking about where me and the fellas were going to go after the game,” Zaun said. “Or about what kind of vacation me and the boys were going to take. And it always revolved around drinking. It was never just about hanging out with my buddies.” ”

In fact, Zaun had already decided to quit drinking for all of spring training when he went on that final binge that February at the bar in Florida. He was a non-roster invitee with the Montreal Expos and sensed it might be his last hurrah after his stints with Baltimore, Florida, Texas, Kansas City, Houston and Colorado.

“I didn’t feel I was in a position this spring to not be at my best every single day,” he said. “And I didn’t like the idea of walking away from the game not knowing what I could have done.” ”

Zaun had worn himself out during a tour of Europe, indulging day and night in its wines. His plan at Expos camp was to cut out alcohol, make the team, then go back to drinking.

In that first spring training with Montreal he was released. Zaun packed up his stuff and moved back to Cincinnati, convinced his playing days were over. It was opening day, April 5th, 2004. Zaun was drinking at the bar at Jeff Ruby’s Steakhouse in Cincinnati.

Dusty Baker and a handful of Cubs players came in to celebrate a 7-4 win, and to Zaun it felt like rubbing salt in the wound. He should have been on a plane or in a hotel somewhere with Montreal. He was thinking he had hit the end of his career. “They tell you once you get off the grid, you’re off the grid.”

It was at this point in his life that he met his future wife, Jamie. When they first met, she tried to keep up with Zaun and his friends but it became quickly evident that this was not an attractive lifestyle to her. Zaun had always believed that he had the talent to be more than a backup, bouncing from club to club and this was his chance to prove it. Getting a shot at his dream, after eight frustrating seasons spent almost entirely as a backup, only happened after Zaun decided to deal head-on with a lust for alcohol affecting his life on and off the field.

“I just made up my mind that drinking was taking away from my baseball abilities,” he says. “I’d look at myself in the mirror, and under my eyes was baggy. My skin was haggard. I didn’t like who I was, so I did something about it.”

Days later, on April 10, the Blue Jays called and offered him a job as a backup catcher in triple A Syracuse. His role was projected to be as a Crash Davis(<http://mopupduty.com/index.php/top-10-baseball-songs-movies/>). type; to mentor catching prospect Guillermo Quiroz and to DH a little. There was no guarantee of playing time at the major-league level. When Jays catcher Greg Myers was injured in late April, Zaun was promoted. After Kevin Cash got hurt, Zaun went on a hitting tear and blocked the plate like no Jay in years, and the team’s ERA fell. Manager Carlos Tosca — coaching in the Marlins system when Zaun earned a World Series ring as a backup with Florida in 1997 — made Zaun his No.1 guy.



(http://i1.wp.com/mopupduty.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/gregg_z aun.jpg).

“

“I got a very good piece of humble pie in Syracuse,” says Zaun, who hit .304 in seven games with the Chiefs. “I needed a wake-up call to take this game seriously, and that was it.”

“I was so happy, like I’d been called up for the first time. I never in my wildest dreams imagined that it was going to turn into what it did, I wasn’t going to jeopardize that by drinking again. I figured whatever happens, happens. However long I’m in the big-leagues, I’m going to make the most of it.” ”

And make the most of it he did. In 338 at bats, a career high at the time, Zaun hit .269 with 24 doubles and 36 driven in. Although not eye-popping stats, the most important aspect that didn’t show up in

the box score was the fact that Toronto pitchers loved pitching to Zaun.



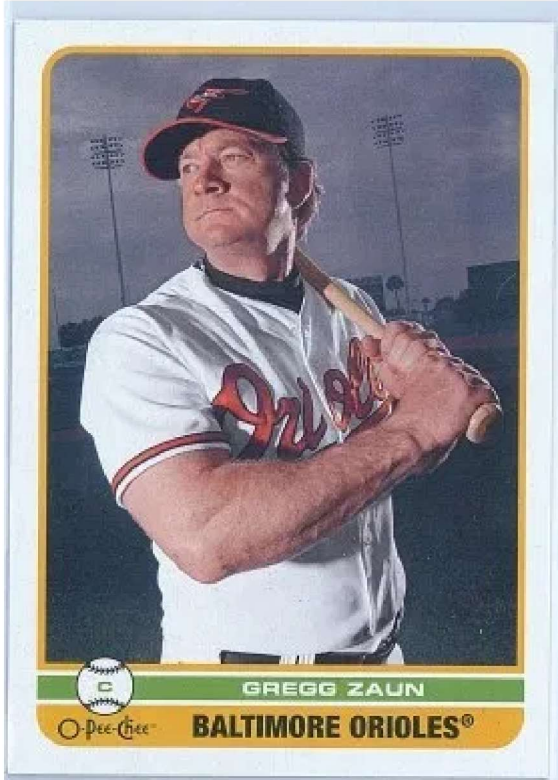
(<http://i1.wp.com/mopupduty.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/doc+hugging+zaun.jpg?resize=229%2C295>).

The following season Zaun managed 434 at bats, going .242/.341/.411 with 11 HR and 52 RBI. The season after that, Zaun reached his prime – at age 35. His line was .272/.363/.462 for an OPS of .825. He hit 12 HR, a career high.

“You’re talking about someone with great work habits who makes people around him better,” Toronto general manager J.P. Ricciardi said. “Zauny used to be a hell-raiser, and perhaps if we had him 10 years ago we’d be bumping a lot of heads. But now he’s an invaluable extension of the coaching staff.”

Zaun wasn’t as old as he looked, or as his birth certificate stated. Years of backing up meant his knees were still fresh. His arm remained strong(http://www.mlb.com/video/play.jsp?content_id=3542515). He works out religiously and has replaced massive quantities of alcohol with massive quantities of Muscle Milk and Lenny’s breakfasts. The highlight of Zaun’s time in Toronto was the walk off Grand Slam Home Run he hit(<http://www.mlb.com/video/play.jsp?>

[content_id=3428485](#)) in the 13th winning to beat the Tampa Bay Rays 7-4. That is followed closely by Zaun's game on On September 13, 2006. That day he hit home runs from both sides of the plate, only the 4th Blue Jay in history to accomplish this feat.



(<http://io.wp.com/mopupduty.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/zaun2.jpg>).

In 2009 Gregg Zaun came full circle and signed with Baltimore. Again, like in Toronto, his role was to groom future star Matt Wieters. Zaun struggled, hitting only .209 and Wieters took over the full time gig in May. Gregg was then dealt to Tampa Bay. It was then that Zaun altered his approach at the plate to try to achieve greater success.

“That approach has completely changed. It used to be ‘lift the ball and drive it.’ Now I’m trying to do the exact opposite. All I’m trying to do is hit hard, one-hop ground balls through the middle of the infield. They turn into line drives, and every once in a while they turn into home runs. It’s working for me. I’m pretty happy about it.” ”

Zaun also altered his batting stance, one that had a low centre of gravity to generate more power to a more upright stance.

“

“I used to hit from a pretty low stance and I relied on my legs to try and generate power,” Zaun said. “I just gave up on it. I wasn’t having consistent at-bats. I was going through way too many peaks and valleys. So I stood up taller and started getting a better look at different types of pitches.”

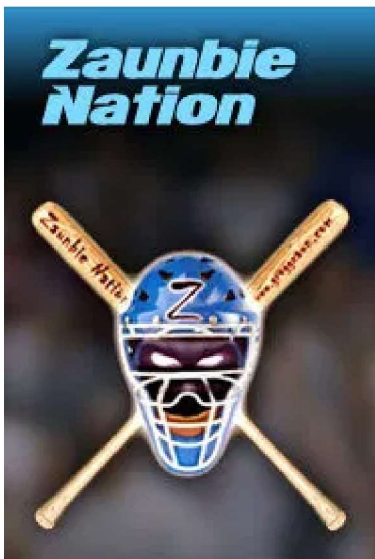
The result, he says, is that he found more steady success against a wider variety of pitchers, especially tall ones who throw overhanded. He can much more easily identify the spin of the baseball out of a pitcher’s hand. ”

In Tampa last season he improved his production significantly, going .287/.323/.489 for an OPS of .813. What I remember most is that as soon as he was traded he immediately stuck it to his old team(http://www.mlb.com/video/play.jsp?content_id=6681679). Then, not long after, he stuck it to his old Toronto teammates and hit a HR off Roy Halladay(http://www.mlb.com/video/play.jsp?content_id=6098703). Zaun parlayed his strong 2nd half for Tampa into a \$1.9 million one year deal with the Milwaukee Brewers, with a club option for a 2nd year at \$2.25 million.



(<http://i1.wp.com/mopupduty.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/greggzaun.jpg>).

So far it has paid off (if spring training can be considered any sort of indication). Zaun has hit at a .477 clip with an OPS of 1.212. This will please the **Zaunbie Nation** – Gregg Zaun’s fanclub – to no end.



(http://i1.wp.com/mopupduty.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/img_zaubie.jpg).

““They started wearing all these crazy ghoul masks,” Zaun said. “I think there were like eight or nine of them. I wouldn’t say it’s

grown. Every once and a while you'll see a sign, but it was pretty much eight guys that didn't even live in Toronto. I figured while it was funny and somewhat popular — all eight of them — you might as well run with it.” ”

How is it that a career backup catcher can have such a loyal following? Perhaps it can be summed up in this quote:

““I'm not afraid to speak my mind when I think things aren't being done right in the clubhouse. I just think the game should be played a certain way and I think it should command a certain amount of respect from players, even in this generation,” Zaun said. “I believe that on the field I'm not the most talented guy in the world, but I play the game with a lot of emotion, a lot of passion and I play hard.” ”

(<http://mopupduty.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/zauner.jpg>).

For me, I will always remember the impenetrable blocking of the plate(http://www.mlb.com/video/play.jsp?content_id=3161540) that Zaun would employ during his time in Toronto. It is the attention to detail from the veteran that commands respect for his game.



<http://i2.wp.com/mopupduty.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/zauner.jpg>

Zaun sporting his own line of golf pants

Zaun's unique style could be a big hit in Milwaukee. From his intense air guitar sessions to his custom made line of golf pants to the Zaunbie Nation. Though he isn't the only Brewer with his own fan club. Lefthanded pitcher Randy Wolf has heard the howls from the 'Wolf Pack' this spring and Zaun laughs at the possibilities of catching the left-hander in a postseason series in October.

"I can't even imagine the costumes if you get the Wolf Pack and the Zaunbie Nation together. It'd be like the Michael Jackson 'Thriller' video."

[youtube sOnqjkJTMaA]



(<http://i1.wp.com/mopupduty.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/calzaun.jpg>).

Callum & Gregg Zaun

Some Facts You May Not Know About Gregg:

- Kauffman Stadium (home of the Kansas City Royals) is his favourite ballpark.
- Gregg's favourite television show is Desperate Housewives. Seriously.
- Cooking is one of Gregg's passions. He cooks Italian, Japanese & Mexican and has a secret pork tenderloin recipe.
- Gregg Zaun was the first professional baseball player to take up the cause of Right to Play(<http://www.righttoplay.com/International/Pages/Home.aspx>), a charity that uses sports as a vehicle to reach children in the most desperate places. Gregg also donated \$25,000 for every baserunner that he threw out to the cause.
- During the playoffs Gregg was an analyst on Sportsnet, sometimes getting himself in hot water for giving honest assessments of players in his colourful commentary.
- Zaun's favourite band is Rush, and lead singer Geddy Lee has come to a few Jays games (<http://mopupduty.com/index.php/geddy-lee->

[the-toronto-blue-jays/](#))to watch him play.

[youtube 7ccvwGYUiXU]

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June 14, 2011
In "2011 Season"

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REB • 11 years ago

How conveniently you forget he was a roid monkey. It is foolish not to mention he tarnished the game with the rest of the cheat.

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eybleaf • 11 years ago

He took steroids. If you believe his story about the cheque, well, good on you.

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eybleaf Guest • 11 years ago

That's certainly a relevant reply.

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Jenn eybleaf • 10 years ago

And if you believe everything you hear you are in some kind of

F@*#ed up world!!!!

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Kman • 11 years ago

If he was on the juice it's hard to find a Brady Anderson like statistical outlier. His career high in HR is 12. Zaun's game has always been about decent D, switch hitting and taking a walk.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



eybleaf → Kman • 11 years ago

Ah, right, the steroids only increase home runs argument. I forgot about that one.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

Callum Hughson • 11 years ago

Of course. He is slugging 1.500 right now. He slugged .400 all of last season. If you don't believe he is on steroids, well, good on you.

It is a relevant reply because if we can say Zaun was on steroids without having any proof, we might as well accuse anyone, and furthermore, know that they did it for sure. Who cares if they never failed a test?

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Matthias Koster • 11 years ago

You're right on that count.

Still, I don't see any statistic that points towards 'performance enhancement' across any of Zaun's stats.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Early • 11 years ago

I'm not here to accuse or defend. However, use of steroids can result in quick turn around time and recovery time, not just masculine strength and home run power or the ability to burn one down the middle.

If someone is suffering from a disease (alcoholism) or is aging using steroids may normalise those otherwise inhibiting factors in one's career.

Barry Bonds only hit 50+ dingers once. Roger Clemens' best year was 1986. I feel PES's did more to extend their careers rather than make them superhuman.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



REB • 11 years ago

Callum, I enjoyed your column nonetheless. His wife would be great as a sports personality on radio or TV, I have heard her speak a few times in the booth and was very impressed. That being said, your refusal to

the booth and was very impressed. That being said, your refusal to speculate on the speculation sounds like a lot of folks found in the Mitchell Report including Zaun. I won't glorify roid monkeys no matter how much they resemble a blue collar as a millionaire.

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