

# Between classes, student talks sports and draws big names to podcast in his dorm

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Jan 14, 2020



Between classes at UChicago, second-year Jon Zaghoul juggles his responsibilities as color commentator, play-by-play announcer and podcast host. Photo by Nancy Wong

## Econ major Jon Zaghoul dreams of career in broadcast booth or the front office

*Editor's note: This story is part of 'Meet a UChicagoan,' a regular series focusing on the people who make UChicago a distinct intellectual community. [Read about the others here.](#)*

Jon Zaghoul admits that his life as a University of Chicago student and aspiring sports broadcaster is “just a bit hectic.”

In addition to managing a full academic schedule each week, the second-year economics major records a show for campus radio station WHPK, provides color commentary and play-by-play for UChicago athletics, and also tapes a weekly podcast from his UChicago dorm room. This past summer, Zaghoul, a standout high school baseball player, [made national headlines](#) by both broadcasting and playing in a game.

A former pitcher from suburban Chicago, Zaghoul was offered a full baseball scholarship to play at a smaller college program in Illinois. But that possibility only reaffirmed his desire to attend UChicago, where he hopes his degree will one day lead to a role with a pro sports team—either in the front office or the broadcast booth.

“I chose UChicago because of the academic standards that we have here,” Zaghoul said. “It’s the best of both worlds here, studying economics but still doing broadcasting. I’m able to do everything that I want to pursue a career in sports, in addition to attending class and getting a good education.”



To second-year student Jon Zaghoul, what makes a good sports broadcaster is the "ability to tell a story or paint a picture for the viewer." Video by UChicago Creative

Zaghoul has quickly made a name for himself as a podcaster, landing high-profile guests from sports to entertainment to politics on his weekly show, including NFL Hall of Famers Jerome Bettis and Warren Sapp, national sportswriters Tim Kurkjian and Bob Nightengale, comedian George Lopez, and former Trump administration officials Anthony Scaramucci and Sean Spicer.

No matter the guest, they bond over a shared passion for sports. “Everyone’s human; everyone likes sports,” Zaghoul said. “The goal is to always get a story out of a guest that no one knows, that they haven’t heard about before.”

## From broadcaster to pitcher

Zaghoul first had the idea for a sports podcast when he was 13. He created a blog covering Chicago sports news, which he later turned into [SportsTalkChicago.com](http://SportsTalkChicago.com). After doing freelance sports writing and play-by-play while in high school, he was named the best student broadcaster in the country in 2018 by the NFHS Network.

Zaghoul began working on his UChicago sports broadcasting career from the day he arrived on campus. In addition to providing color commentary for Maroons football, he also handles play-by-play and color commentary for the UChicago baseball and basketball teams.

“What I think makes a good sports broadcaster is your ability to tell a story or paint a picture for the viewer,” he said. “If they’re listening on the radio or they can’t see the game at the moment, you want to create a good picture for them that tells the story of what’s going on.”

This past summer, Zaghoul made national headlines for something that *didn’t* happen in the broadcast booth: He left his announcing duties to serve as a relief pitcher during the ninth inning of the Crestwood Panthers’ collegiate league baseball game.

“I informed fans tuning in that I would be leaving the announcer’s chair, and that the remainder of the game would only produce audio from the crowd microphone,” said Zaghoul, who allowed one run in one inning. “To my knowledge, this is the first time in sports broadcasting history that an announcer has been summoned from the booth to the pitcher’s mound.”

Zaghoul later appeared on [ESPN’s SportsCenter](#) to discuss his appearance.

“My baseball career was all but over, or so I thought,” Zaghoul said. “But to come in for one last time and do well, throw some strikes, help my team out, it was unbelievable. I’ll never forget it.”



An economics major who turned down an offer to play baseball at an NAIA school, Zaghoul sees sports as a way to connect with people from various backgrounds.

Photo by Nancy Wong

## **The economics of sports**

Another one of Zaghoul’s repeat guests on his podcast is Senior Lecturer Allen Sanderson, who researches the economics of sports. Zaghoul recalls one of Sanderson’s lectures during the course “Principles of Microeconomics” as one of the defining moments that reaffirmed his interest in the discipline.

“It was before Thanksgiving break, and with many students gone for travel, he set aside the usual curriculum to talk sports economics,” Zaghoul recalled. “The entire class, he discussed the theory behind the NFL Draft and how the worst team gets the best pick versus the best team getting the worst pick, and if that’s really valid.”

Zaghoul called it the best class he’s attended at UChicago. Zaghoul later welcomed Sanderson as a guest on his podcast to discuss a number of sports-related issues, including the NCAA and whether college athletes should be paid.



Jon Zaghoul at Stagg Field, where he serves as the color commentator for UChicago football games.  
Photo by Nancy Wong

The prospect of a career exploring these topics and negotiating trades and acquisitions for a professional team excites Zaghoul.

“Economics fascinates me in the sense that it can readily explain human behavior. Whether you like it or not, people's lives revolve around the dollar. They make calculated decisions based on monetary incentives,” Zaghoul said. “Is it worth signing a certain player? Should I make this trade? Those are questions that I hope to be a part of, and answer.”

But it’s in the broadcast booth where Zaghoul feels most at home.

“To me, there is nothing else that can replicate this thrill,” he said. “It doesn’t feel like a job to me; it’s my passion, and I hope it defines my future career.”

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