UChicago News: https://news.uchicago.edu/story/between-classes-student-talks-sports-and-draws-bignames-podcast-his-dorm

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

By Emily R. Ehret

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

Econ major Jon Zaghloul 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. <u>Read about the others here</u>.

Jon Zaghloul 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, Zaghloul, a standout high school baseball player, made national headlines by both broadcasting and playing in a game.

A former pitcher from suburban Chicago, Zaghloul 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," Zaghloul 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 Zaghloul, what makes a good sports broadcaster is the "ability to tell a story or paint a picture for the viewer." Video by UChicago Creative

Zaghloul 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," Zaghloul 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

Zaghloul 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. 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.

Zaghloul 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.

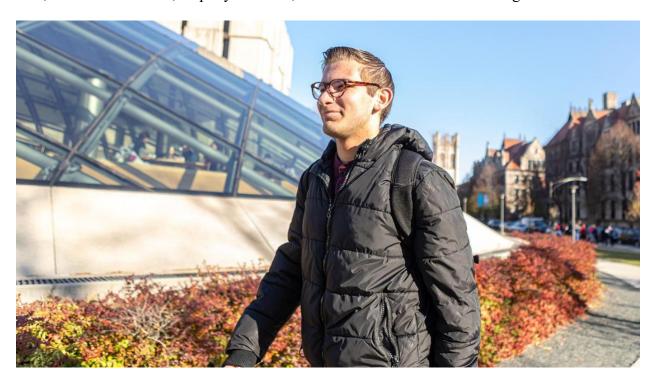
"What I think makes a good sports broadcaster is your ability to tell a story or paint a picture for the viewer," he said. "If they're listening on the radio or they can't see the game at the moment, you want to create a good picture for them that tells the story of what's going on."

This past summer, Zaghloul 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 Zaghloul, 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."

Zaghloul later appeared on ESPN's SportsCenter to discuss his appearance.

"My baseball career was all but over, or so I thought," Zaghloul 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, Zaghloul sees sports as a way to connect with people from various backgrounds. Photo by Nancy Wong

The economics of sports

Another one of Zaghloul's repeat guests on his podcast is Senior Lecturer Allen Sanderson, who researches the economics of sports. Zaghloul 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," Zaghloul 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."

Zaghloul called it the best class he's attended at UChicago. Zaghloul 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 Zaghloul 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 Zaghloul.

"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," Zaghloul 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 Zaghloul 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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