



## **Bogusevic beyond irony as childhood Sox fan trying to make Cubs**

*By George Castle, CBM Historian  
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At some point, you leave behind part of the childhood passions that first propelled you into baseball.

Brian Bogusevic is at that point now, confident as a major leaguer to play anywhere a job is on the line. The Oak Lawn native and De La Salle Institute alum has moved beyond the irony of his baseball life.

Here was a kid once immersed in White Sox black-and-white, but is now close to going north wearing blue Cubs pinstripes. Added to that schizophrenic identity is that of a Cubs killer, having collected his first big-league grand slam homer in walk-off fashion against Chicago in 2011.



**Brian Bogusevic during his Houston Astros days  
(Photo courtesy of Sandy Bogusevic).**

After starting out 9-for-20 in spring training in Mesa and impressing Cubs manager Dale Sveum, Bogusevic, 29, is traveling down the path of the crosstown-breaching identity sported by others. But that journey is more of a big deal to others than to the left-handed hitting outfielder. More important is the chance to start fresh after spending his first eight pro seasons in the Houston Astros organization.

“Honestly, it’s not too strange,” Bogusevic said via phone from Arizona. “Once you get into professional baseball, you kind of lose all that home-team feeling. Every team is the same opportunity.”

More importantly is the opportunity to continue his career after being swept up in a housecleaning in Houston that followed an ownership change and preceded a new manager in Bo Porter. Personal numbers that declined to .203 from .287 in 2011 did not help.

“I can’t think of many people who spent an entire career in one organization,” Bogusevic

said. “It really doesn’t happen. Especially when you’re in a situation where you’re with a team that is having a lot of turnover and making a lot of changes. It’s really only a matter of time.”

### **Numbers game favorable to bid for Cubs job?**

With prospect Brett Jackson slated to get more Triple-A experience, the Cubs had outfield openings. They signed Scott Hairston, another local product out of Naperville, as a free agent. Fan favorite Tony Campana was just traded to the Diamondbacks. So the opportunity to snare an outfield/pinch-hitter spot existed for the 6-foot-3, 220-pound Bogusevic after signing a minor-league deal last fall.

“They were a team that showed interest,” he said. “The situation I was in, I wanted to get something done early. I didn’t want any doors to close while I was trying to make a decision or wait for something else. We (agent Rick Thurman) were in contact early. I just thought it would be a good opportunity.

“Come into a camp as one of a handful of guys who are competing basically for one spot. It’s a competitive situation. You come in ready to play and do your best.”

Bogusevic basically is competing with rookie Dave Sappelt for the open outfield spot. He has two advantages: a left-handed bat with some thump and the ability to play first base. Other than utility man Brent Lillibridge, Sveum had no one else in camp who could back up Anthony Rizzo. Bogusevic played some first in the minors, and is able to show his ability around the bag while Rizzo is away playing for Team Italy in the World Baseball Classic.

“I’m comfortable over there,” Bogusevic said of first base. “I’m trying to put in some work as I can to get better. Any versatility makes you more valuable and creates more opportunity to make the team. As a bench player, you have to hit, that’s what they’re looking for. Being able to show you can play outfield and infield helps, but the main thing is that (hitting).”

Bogusevic came into a Cubs camp noted for the work ethic set by Sveum and his coaches. They’re kind of a “dawn patrol,” known for starting early and ending late. Sveum respectfully turned down some live Chicago evening-news TV appearances during camp since he goes to bed early to accommodate his early starts. During the season, media entering the Wrigley Field clubhouse at 9:50 a.m. for a 1:20 p.m. start are already too late to snare some pitchers for interviews. The hurlers are already on the field working.

### **Getting to know the coaches**

“Over a short period of time, I’ve started to develop relationships with the coaches,” Bogusevic said. “I didn’t know any of them. They really didn’t know me. It’s gone well so far.

“It seems to be a place where things are done correctly. They expect us to do things correctly. It’s very well-organized. There’s time to be serious and time to have fun. You get the best of everything. They tried to do it to set an example from the top down. Everybody wants to do the right thing to put in the work. The coaches are showing they’re putting in extra effort, doing whatever it takes. So nobody will question when they ask a player to put in extra work to do whatever it takes.”



**Was Brian Bogusevic a "natural?" Here he's swinging a bat at 18 months (Photo courtesy of Sandy Bogusevic).**

Good thing almost all of the coaches and many of the players weren't around Aug. 16, 2011 at Minute Maid Park. The Cubs led the Astros 5-2 in the ninth inning with closer Carlos Marmol pitching. But, as is often his style, Marmol found himself with the bases loaded and one out. Called on to pinch hit, Bogusevic belted the grand slam to win the game 6-5.

Just to show he was just as objective against his old favorites as against the Cubs, Bogusevic slugged a three-run homer off reliever Will Ohman in the ninth June 8, 2012 at U.S. Cellular Field to put the game out of reach in an 8-3 Astros win over the White Sox.

Bogusevic's power displays against the Cubs and Sox were the latest in his long journey through academia and baseball from his childhood home at 99<sup>th</sup> and Major in Oak Lawn. He's never taken the easy path.

Instead of attending nearby parochial high schools, Bogusevic opted for the long commute, first via trains and buses, then car, to De La Salle, the alma mater of generations of Daleys four blocks east of The Cell. He fell in love with the school during a visit. Bogusevic liked the fact he was "outside your little bubble."

### **College a must from Mom**

Mother Sandy Bogusevic was insistent on a college education instead of going into pro baseball after De La Salle. Brian cooperated by getting 28 on his ACT to get into academically-challenging Tulane University in New Orleans. He got a degree in business law.

"College was much better (than the minors)," Sandy Bogusevic told Oak LawnPatch.com last June. You still have that old feeling you have to have something to fall back on. You need to know how to manage your money. I felt it was really important. I hadn't gotten my degree then (since then she has completed college). Even after he was drafted (in 2005), I told him you got to promise me finish college."

Bogusevic faced another challenge that continues today. Mainly a pitcher in college, he was drafted by the Astros in the first round in 2005 on the strength of his left arm. But his performance steadily declined through the minors. The Astros converted him to an outfielder in July 2008. He hit .411 in his first month as a position player. Bogusevic's bat got him called up Aug. 1, 2011, just in time to kill the Cubs.

Now he continues to try to master sports' most difficult



**Brian Bogusevic as a De La Salle player at U.S. Cellular Field (Photo courtesy of Sandy Bogusevic).**

task – hitting a baseball.

“I spend a lot of time in the cage with (Cubs hitting coach) James Rowson and (assistant hitting coach) Rob Deer,” Bogusevic said. “A lot of the things are your regular spring-training things, getting back into the swing of things. And then there are other things we’re trying to work on. Just kind of fine-tuning the swing and be able to stay consistent from game to game.”

If he does make the Cubs, Bogusevic wants the biggest change of pace in his career to date. He played on two consecutive 100-defeat Astros teams, arguably the worst in the majors. The Cubs also want to start the long climb from 101 losses last season.

A lot of positive contributions are needed to get away from that ignominious century mark. Bogusevic simply desires to chip in some of what’s needed.



**Brian Bogusevic playing for Tulane in the College World Series (Photo courtesy of Sandy Bogusevic).**