

## **Zaruba, 37, bowls 'em over at Mount Mercy**

Written by Tom Fruehling  
Monday, 19 December 2011 22:30 -

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Jamie Zaruba is making up for some of the things he missed from high school.

He's studying theater arts and hopes to teach it some day soon. He sings in two school choirs. And here's something he wasn't able to do back when he was a student at Jefferson High School 20 years ago: He is a full-fledged member of his school's bowling team at Mount Mercy University in Cedar Rapids.

Zaruba is 37 years old, married and the father of two children. He's an Army veteran with all kinds of experience in civilian jobs. And he's a senior at Mount Mercy about to launch a whole new career.

"I'm about 18 years behind the curve," he says of reliving, or re-inventing, his youth.

Bowling wasn't a sanctioned high school sport until a few years ago. There were club teams that competed on a friendly basis when Zaruba was in high school. Not like today, with eligibility rules, state-certified coaches, conference schedules and state tournaments.

College teams were unheard of when Zaruba attended Jefferson. Now, promising prep bowlers can earn four-year scholarships.

Zaruba, a 1993 Jeff graduate and sports editor of the high school newspaper back then, dabbled in all sorts of athletics in his more-svelte younger days. He was in junior bowling leagues, too.

"I think I built my average up all the way to about 130," he says.

Before his youth was fully spent, he entered adult life. He worked in the real world for 10 years in a hodge-podge of jobs, including a stint at Parsons Technology before it, too, was re-invented

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as Go Daddy. And he got pretty serious about bowling, pushing his average in several local leagues to 220. He once thought of turning pro someday. With teammates, he competed in five national tournaments in places like Reno and Las Vegas.

"Those were really more vacations, with a little bowling thrown in," he admits.

Married in 2001, he and wife Jackie have a son, Zander, 9, and daughter Samantha, 7, both of them students at Pierce Elementary. In 2003, Zaruba enlisted in the Army, thinking he might make a career in the military as a watercraft engine mechanic.

An onset of early arthritis and a bad back almost four years later forced him to take a medical discharge. But that, he says, is when his life turned around for good.

"I always wanted to be a teacher, and through the VA (Veterans Administration) I was given the opportunity to pursue a dream," he says.

Under the government's innovative vocational rehabilitation program for veterans, he started part-time in a liberal arts curriculum at Kirkwood Community College and earned an associate degree in 2010. Zaruba then dove into college life full-time at Mount Mercy.

As a speech communications and theater major, he plans to do his student teaching next fall and graduate a year from now. He's been active in the Cedar Rapids opera company as well as performing in college plays and musicals. And he thinks he's the only one of his classmates at Mount Mercy who's also a Cub Scout pack master.

"It's fun," the later-in-life Joe College says. "I'm involved in a lot of stuff, in addition to having a family."

When the university announced last year it was going to add men's and women's bowling to its intercollegiate athletic schedule, Zaruba jumped into that, as well. "I thought it would be cool to

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be on a team again," he says.

On a 10-man squad filled with teenaged freshman phenoms, he admits he's not the best of the bunch. So far, he's competed in two meets. Despite a long layoff from the lanes, he has his average up to around 170.

"I'm fighting to get back to where I was," he says.

Already, though, he's in the Mustang record book. "I've got the school's all-time lowest score, a 106 game in one match," he explains. "I wasn't happy with that."

But, as they say in bowling circles, at least he's made his mark.