

# Cornering Jabari Arthur

## A look inside the football life of the most prolific wide receiver in Akron Zips Football history

by Marcel Ulrich • October 9, 2018 • ZipsNation.org

Sitting at the Spaghetti Warehouse in downtown Akron, former Zips wide receiver, and now UA Hall of Famer Jabari (pronounced 'Juh-BERRY') Arthur awaited his appearance on the Zips Live radio show. "This is the first time I've come back to Akron since I graduated," said Jabari. "The last time I was in here was in March or April of 2008, just before my pro day. It's kind of funny...a friend of mine and I snuck into the field house. None of the lights were on. We were using the JUGS machine and I was catching balls in the dark, just so I could get a few extra grabs in before the next morning."

### Campus Changes Make an Impression

The Montreal native marveled at the transformation the UA campus has undergone since February 2003 when he signed his National Letter of Intent to play for the Zips. "From the time I arrived on campus in 2003, until the time I left in 2008, the campus had already done a complete 360. It went from just streets, to having a field house, with a beautiful Student Union. I think I arrived on this campus at the right time."

"I came in from Calgary this week and it was such a cool thing for me to arrive on campus and try to pick up on things I recognized. That stadium is the first thing that catches your eye. I was like "WOW, look at THAT! When I was here is was just a bunch of houses and dorms. It's awesome."

"When I moved off campus, I lived in three different locations in five years. Two of them are now torn down. I lived on Spicer, the second house down after you cross Exchange Street. They've turned it into a parking lot. I parked my car there today and said "This is where I used to sleep!" It's great though, because the campus looks awesome. Bee-utiful!"

Playing his entire career at the Rubber Bowl, I wondered if a trip to the old stadium, or what remains of it, was on his agenda. "It's on our to-do list for tomorrow. I told my girlfriend I want her to have the full 'Akron Zips Experience' with me. And that, for sure, has to include a stop at the Rubber Bowl. I wish I could have gotten here sooner to see it before they started tearing it down."



Jabari gets introduced to the Infocision stadium crowd during a timeout

---

He then summed up his feelings on the old stadium, sentiments that likely reflect those of many ex-Akron players, fans and alumni - "The stadium the Zips have now is beautiful, and the guys are so fortunate to be playing in it. But the Rubber Bowl had a mystique about it. Something about it...the name...the tradition...it was a very special place. Even though it was getting older and run-down when I was there, I don't think people minded just because of the tradition, and the energy that was shared there. I loved the Rubber Bowl."

### **Swimming's Loss Becomes the Zips' Gain**

"It's kind of funny...I started playing football in 1989. I was seven years old." said Arthur as he recalled how his football journey began. "The year before, I'd tried to learn how to swim and I caught the chicken pox from somebody in my class. When my parents asked me what I wanted to do for the next summer, they asked if I wanted to give swimming another try, or do something else. Being a six year old I didn't realize I couldn't get chicken pox again, and I absolutely didn't want to take the chance of sitting in my house for 3 weeks just itching, so I said 'let's try something else.' My dad said 'How about football?' and I jumped on it. I've never looked back...it's been absolutely great. I've had fun from the first time I ever put on a uniform."

### **Montreal Football**

Jabari was 20 years old when he first stepped on campus. "In Quebec we have a little different schooling system (than the United States). He explained - "You graduate high school in grade 11. Then you go to what's called a CEGEP (pronounced SEE-jep) that represents grades 12 and 13. It's kind of a mix of high school and prep school. I attended Vanier (pronounced Van-YAY) College and had some football success, so I started sending out game tape."

"I always knew I wanted to play football in the United States. Growing up in Montreal we watched a lot of eastern teams, like Notre Dame, Florida State and Miami. But when I started doing my research, I liked the MAC. It seemed pretty cool."

"Akron showed an interest. They were one of 5 schools that offered me at quarterback. A few other schools offered me at other positions, but I wanted to play

QB. A major influence on me ultimately choosing Akron was the relatives I had in Cincinnati. If I was going to move to the states it was important to me to be close to some kind of family."

### **2002's #1 Rated Prospect in Canada**

Arthur was rated 2002's #1 college football prospect in Canada. But during that time it was possible for talent to fly under the radar. "A guy like 'Touchdown Tim' Biakabataka (former Michigan Wolverine and Varnier College grad) kind of paved the way for Canadian-born college players making an impact in the USA in the early 90's. Today, it's way different than it was 15 years ago. With social media, there's a lot more exposure available. There's a lot more hype around Canadian players and a lot more opportunities for guys to get recognized for what they do. Finding talent in Canada is a lot easier than it used to be. And, I think there are a lot more guys aspiring to play in the United States than ever before."

### **Plans Change**

"When I arrived on campus Lee Owens was the head coach, and Charlie Frye was 'The Guy.' Charlie was one of, if not THE best quarterbacks I've ever worked with. I learned a lot about being a student athlete by playing behind him. When Coach Owens left in 2003 and Coach Brookhart came in from Pitt, I thought it would be my opportunity to play quarterback. But Luke Getsy came along with Brookhart and the staff felt he was better-suited for the offense we were going to run. He was obviously familiar with it."

"Coach Brookhart and Coach Joe Moorhead told me my best chance to play football at the next level was going to be wide receiver. But it wasn't an easy decision to let go of being a QB. I came here as a quarterback, and I wanted to play the position. I definitely felt I could compete in that system as a quarterback. I was really upset...angry...and I was ready to leave."

"But the guys that I'd built relationships with...guys like Marcus Patterson, Jason Montgomery, Dominik Hixon, those guys were like 'Look, man...come play receiver with us and we'll take care of you.' I thought 'I can't leave these guys. They've been there with me since the first day I arrived in Akron.' I just wanted to have fun with them, so I ultimately had faith in the coach's decision and decided to stay."

---

## A Coach's Influence

"When Coach Moorhead took the HC job at Mississippi State earlier this year, we spoke on the phone. He's a great guy. A huge motivator, a huge influence in my life as a receiver. I'm not surprised at all at the success he's had since he left Akron (Fordham HC, Penn State OC and now MSU HC). He was a great coach from Day 1 when I met him. His football knowledge is second to none. He's one of the greatest football brains I've ever had the opportunity to work with."

"It's kind of funny, when I first turned to receiver, he had a saying 'Eyes-to-Tuck.' (watch the ball into the hands, and then lock it in a protected position using the hand, forearm, and elbow, squeezing it into the body). Now that I'm a coach, I tell my guys all the time 'Eyes-to-tuck.' That's something he drilled into me 14 years ago, and I still use it to this day when I teach my guys."

## Playing on the Big Stage

"I remember my freshman year we played Wisconsin. It was the largest crowd we'd ever played in front of. I remember it was 4th-and-3, and the crowd was so loud that my shoulder pads were rattling on my body. I was like 'Wow...this is unbelievable... this is what I imagined college sports to be about!'"

"I loved playing in those big games because no matter what, we were always the underdog. There wasn't any pressure...we just went out and played. We always played for ourselves. It didn't matter who we were playing against...we always felt we weren't playing with the person beside you, but for the person beside you. You know, nobody felt we could win against NC State, except the guys in our locker room. And we did."

## The CFL Can Wait

Drafted by the Calgary Stampeders with the 6th pick in the CFL draft following his junior season, Jabari had the opportunity to turn professional. But he elected to stay at Akron. Was it an easy decision? "No, and yes," he said. "I grew up in Montreal, and although there was a Montreal Alouettes team there when I was growing up, there wasn't one while I was at Akron. So my favorite team was the Calgary Stampeders. I loved their colors...red, white and black."

But, while saying "no" to his favorite professional team was tough, the decision to remain with his Akron teammates was easy. "In the end it was an easy decision to

come back and play my senior season at Akron. There were a bunch of guys that I shared my blood, sweat and tears with for four years, and I wanted to finish things at Akron the right way. I knew the professional opportunities would also present themselves after I graduated. I just wanted to enjoy my senior year with the guys."

## Special Akron Memories

When asked about special times that stood out during his Akron football career, there were many. "Scoring my first touchdown, against Miami of Ohio, was awesome. I'm looking forward to seeing us playing against them on Saturday. It'll definitely bring back some memories."

"Going to the MAC Championship... Dominik Hixon scoring that touchdown in the back of the endzone to give us the lead. It was just awesome..."

And the memories aren't all game moments, there were also emotions and friendships. "I definitely remember that feeling of the countdown towards the end of my senior year, as we got closer and closer to my final game in a Zips uniform."

"The friendships I made during my time at Akron were so special. I've watched a couple interviews with Emmitt Smith, and when he talks about the people in his career he always brings up his close relationship with "Moose" Johnson. For me, that guy is Marcus Patterson. He's from New York. Not the tallest guy...not the fastest guy...but he was the first person to enter any competition. He's the most



*Jabari breaks free against Ohio State*



---

competitive guy I've ever met, and he used to challenge me at everything. If I was feeling tired and didn't want to run during conditioning, he'd say 'Come on man, you can run faster than that! There's always more!' He's a big reason for my success here at Akron. We still talk all the time."

"I still keep in touch with the other Akron teammates from Canada. Jermaine Reid (Zips defensive lineman and CFL player) I expect to see him this week, and also Jason Nedd (Zips defensive back and CFL player)."

"Reggie Corner (played several years at CB for the Buffalo Bills) is a guy I went up against every single practice. It's so awesome that he has a son on the Zips today. I haven't seen Reggie Jr. since he was a toddler, so it will be fun to meet him."

### **The Zips-CFL Brotherhood**

Regarding his time in the CFL, I asked Jabari – "If there's a player on the opposing team that played for Akron, are you aware of it? Do you exchange any words in the postgame handshakes? He replied - "At the end of a game, it's more than just shaking hands. We actually hug each other. It's like a fraternity. It's like were brothers. We're Zips and we'll always be family."

"Football is a game for brutes played by gentlemen. I've made some great friends over the years in the CFL. They've become family. You know I actually played with a couple Akron Zips while I was in Calgary. I played with Shawn Lemon, and Devanso Tate (DB)."

On Lemon, Arthur then added "My senior year at Akron, Shawn Lemon was a freshman. Every time I see him I tell him I'm so proud of him, because as a freshman...he was one of those guys I thought needed to get out of here. He was just a troublemaker. To see how far he's come since his freshman year, to turn into the player you see today in the CFL is just awesome. Mondo Sewell is another guy that's had a lot of success in the CFL. He was also a freshman when I was a senior."

### **Calgary Becomes Home**

"I was with the Kansas City Chiefs for a short while in 2008, but was unfortunately released. I then joined the Calgary Stampeders. That year the Grey Cup was held in Montreal. So it ended up that my rookie year in the CFL I was playing in Montreal, my home town, in the Grey Cup. And, we won the game. It was just unbelievable! The moon and the stars had to line up for that to happen. Definitely one of the highlights of my football career."

"My eight years in the CFL were great. My teams had three Grey Cup appearances, winning two of them. I have awesome memories of playing in Calgary. I love the city, and live there now. It's an absolutely beautiful place. Everywhere you go there's an unbelievable view. There's mountains in the background, and a beautiful river (the Bow) that goes right through the center of town. I just love where I'm at right now."

"I'm presently coaching football at the University of Calgary. College football is a little bit different in Canada than in the United States. The budgets are different, so every coach has multiple titles. I'm the receivers coach, an offensive assistant, and I work on strength and conditioning too. It's really cool that I get to work with my athletes not only on the field, but in the weight room. Working with young men, molding them into becoming successful people, I just love them. We're doing pretty well right now, ranked #3 in the country and chasing a championship. I'm super-fortunate to have the opportunity after my playing days were done to continue being part of the game I love."

### **Keeping an Eye on the Zips**

Is he up-to-speed on the 2018 edition of the Zips? "Oh, for sure!" he says. "When you're in a CFL locker room everyone always talks about their alma mater, and when our schools play each other we'll make friendly bets on the outcome. If you lose you have to wear the other team's shirt for a day...things like that. Yeah, I've always followed Akron since the time I left."

"I'm actually really proud of direction they're going right now" said Arthur. "I was very proud to play here, and I'm always checking the score tickers on Saturdays." He laughed, "I'll always look at the end of the season to see who's moving up in the record book, see who's chasing me."

### **The Records**

The name "Jabari Arthur" is easy to find in the Akron record book. He sits atop the list in multiple categories - Most Career Receptions (184), Most Career Yardage (2,653), Most Single Season Catches (86), Most Single Game Catches (15) and Most Single Game Yardage (223). Now, over a decade later, how does he feel about his place in Zips football history?

"I take pride in it because it almost didn't happen. My father passed away my first semester at Akron. I wasn't even going to come back to school. But my mom and

---

---

my grandmother packed my bags and sent me off. Then, after being switched to receiver, I was angry. I didn't want to be here anymore. But I stuck around because of the guys and the relationships I'd created."

"The cool thing about having the records and being in the Hall of Fame is being able to look back at the guys that shaped me. I look at Dominik Hixon (2-time Super Bowl champ with the Giants) and what he contributed to me becoming a great wide receiver. And before him, Matt Cherry (WR, and now Hollywood film director). I'll never forget the first time I walked in to our weight room and saw Matt doing 60 pound bicep curls. It was unbelievable. He showed me the level work I needed to do to become a great receiver. Jason Montgomery (caught the game-winning TD pass from Charlie Frye to beat Marshall in 2004), he was #81 at Akron. I told myself if I ever play professionally, I want to wear #81."

"The records mean a lot because all those guys are part of it. It's my name in the book, but the records represent the guys that I played with, the guys that always held me accountable and always challenged me...both teammates and coaches. They represent all of us. They're records, but they're bigger than just the numbers."

"The fact that those records still stand almost 15 years later is awesome. The fact that I hold them is humbling, and I'm honored."

Does he foresee the records falling anytime soon? "I had the opportunity to speak to some of the Zips receivers today" he stated. "And I told them 'Someone in this group is going to break these records.' I put a challenge out to them just like guys put a challenge out to me when I played."

#### **When it comes to memories, often - "The Little Things Were the Big Things"**

As we concluded the interview and shook hands, Jabari stopped for a moment and added one additional comment – "There's one group of people I forgot to recognize. In my senior year there was a 'Jabari Arthur's Corner' at the Rubber Bowl. A group of guys had a painted white bedsheet that said 'Jabari Arthur's Corner.' I thought it was so cool. Every time I scored a touchdown I'd try to run over there and celebrate with them. At my last home game I took a few pictures with them and they actually handed me the sheet. I still have it to this day. They were a great group of guys. Awesome, and a really cool part of my experience here. I'd love to shake their hands if I ever saw them again. If you're out there guys...I really appreciate what you all did, and Thank You!"

#### **A Return to the Akron Sideline**

There was no storybook game on October 6th, as the 2018 Zips dropped a disappointing 41-17 homecoming decision to the Miami Redhawks. But you got the feeling the dapperly-dressed kid from Montreal probably didn't notice. Standing on the side line awaiting his 2nd quarter PA acknowledgement, his broad smile only seemed to widen. After a 10 year absence, his personal sun-splashed Akron homecoming, shared with so many friends, fans, family members and former teammates, seemed supremely fulfilling.



*Jabari takes in the Miami Redhawks game from the sideline.*

---